



JOHN CAREW

Carew sold to Fulham

Football

AFP, Valencia

Valencia have agreed to sell Norwegian international striker John Carew to English Premier League club Fulham, the Primera Liga club announced on Friday.

As 22-year-old Carew arrived in London for talks with Fulham, Valencia president Jaime Orti said: "The player is going to London to sign for Fulham."

Reports said the fee was expected to be around 18 million euros (16.1 million dollars), twice what the lanky forward cost when

he joined Valencia last season from Norwegian side Rosenborg for approximately eight million dollars.

Carew attracted English attention following his Champions League performances for Valencia, who were the beaten finalists in Europe's elite club competition in the past two seasons.

However, his domestic form has been poor and he has started just three of Valencia's 18 league games this season without scoring a single goal.

Manuel Llorente, a senior Valencia director, said that Carew was surplus to requirements at the Spanish giants.

"This season he has not entered into the plans of the coach (Rafa

Benitez)," he said.

Llorente added that Carew was expected to complete discussions over his personal terms with the London-based club on Monday.

Fulham, last season's First Division champions, managed by former France international Jean Tigana, have been searching for more attacking edge after scoring just 20 goals in 20 Premier League matches this season.

The London club, who have also been linked with unsettled Manchester United striker Dwight Yorke, have plenty of financial strength as they are bankrolled by the multi-millionaire owner of Harrods department store Mohamed Al Fayed.

Vogts eyes Scottish post

Football

AFP, Glasgow

Kuwait's national coach Berti Vogts said Friday he wanted to have talks with the Scottish Football Association (SFA) with a view to succeeding Craig Brown as national coach.

Vogts, a former German national coach, had been reported in a Kuwaiti newspaper as saying he had not spoken to the SFA.

But the 55-year-old, currently in charge of Kuwait, has expressed his interest in taking over from Brown, who stepped down in October last year after Scotland failed to qualify for this year's World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

"My manager spoke to the Scottish federation, but I have to prepare the Kuwaiti team for the Gulf Cup," Vogts told Scotland Today.

"At the end of January I will be ready to speak to the Scottish federation - or maybe the SFA will come to see my manager in Switzerland or he will go to Scotland."

"I need to wait to hear from the Scottish federation."

"The Scottish team has a lot of

experience and a lot of good young players.

"The Scottish must now go for qualification for the European Championship in Portugal, and we will have to wait for the draw on January 25 in Porto.

"I am the manager of Kuwait, I was the manager in Germany and I am very interested in the job in Scotland.

"Craig Brown is a good friend, and I think he has a lot of good words for me."

Vogts succeeded Germany legend and 1974 World Cup-winning teammate Franz Beckenbauer as national team boss after 'the Kaiser' guided Germany to World Cup victory at Italia 90.

But four years later under Vogts defeat by Bulgaria saw Germany fail to make last eight at the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

However Vogts and indeed Germany's international reputation was restored with victory at the 1996 European Championships in England.

Even so, more World Cup misery, by German standards at least, followed two years later with quarterfinal defeat by Croatia in France.

Vogts returned to club management, steering Bayer Leverkusen to fourth place in the Bundesliga

before his sacking in May 2001.

He then took charge of the Kuwait national team on a one-year contract and, once the Gulf Cup is over, could be free to lead Scotland.

French favour in UEFA.com team

AFP, Paris

Five French players made the 2001 team of the year chosen by visitors to the UEFA.com website of football's European governing body, the site revealed on Friday.

More than three million votes were cast.

Team (home country/club): Santiago Canizares (Spa/Valencia), Cosmin Contra (Rom/AC Milan), Sami Hyypia (Fin/ Liverpool), Patrik Andersson (Swe/ Barcelona), Bixente Lizarazu (Fra/ Bayern Munich), David Beckham (Eng/Manchester United), Patrick Vieira (Fra/Arsenal), Kily Gonzalez (Arg/Valencia), Zinedine Zidane (Fra/Real Madrid), David Trezeguet (Fra/Juventus), Thierry Henry (Fra/Arsenal)

Champs League Hampden will stage it

AFP, Glasgow

Hampden Park's managing director insisted here Friday that the Scottish national football stadium would be ready to host the Champions League final in May despite recent pitch problems.

An investigation is under way at the Glasgow ground into how a number of plastic heating pipes 10 inches below the surface of the pitch were punctured.

It is possible an aerator machine could have pierced some of the pipes.

Stadium bosses have switched off the heating system and are planning to bring in a heated dome next week to protect the turf from wintry conditions.

Hampden's managing director David Kells said Friday: "We do have a problem with the under-soil heating system and we are trying to identify how that happened and the extent of the problem."

Fiore triple deal done

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina have completed the signings of three players as they bid to stay in the Serie A, the club's president and owner Vittorio Cecchi Gori told journalists Friday.

Cecchi Gori, a film mogul, said that he had completed the signing of Lazio's Yugoslav international defender Sinisa Mihajlovic and Inter Milan strikers Anselmo Robbiati and Adriano, a Brazilian, until the end of the season.

"Those three are available for Sunday's match should (coach Roberto) Mancini need them," said Cecchi Gori. "All that remains is for (managing director Luciano) Luca to sign the registration forms on Saturday. There is no reason they will not come."

Cecchi Gori also revealed he was negotiating with AS Roma to buy Yugoslav utility man Ivan Tomic from the champions.

Fiorentina's chronic cash problems have decimated their playing staff but the impresario was upbeat about the team's prospects in 2002, saying: "The important thing is that we do not go down to Serie B."

PSG wish Anelka well

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint Germain coach Luis Fernandez wished his former troublesome charge Nicolas Anelka well here on Friday but also lamented the rise of the wanderlust generation who have lost the love of the colours they wear.

The fiery PSG coach inherited Anelka when taking over a demoralised, but young star-studded side half way through last season. His rebuilding plan saw him loan out the last of his temperamental players to Liverpool recently.

"When I see a player leave I'm always sad," said the former France international who coached PSG to 1996 Cup Winners Cup glory during his last stint at the club.

Fernandez added that he hoped Anelka would "recapture his desire to score goals in a league he knows well," before lamenting on how things could have been.

"I had Nico (Anelka) when he was just 17, then he left for Arsenal and then Real Madrid... If I had stayed six years ago I would have found a way to persuade him to stay," the 41-year-old claimed.

But Fernandez believes that players like Anelka, and two other young stars he jettisoned from the PSG squad, have now fallen foul of a new phenomenon in European football.

"If I moved my children from one country to another every year they would lose their friends, their bearings, their culture and their identity," he told the daily Le Parisien.

"This generation needs to find some stability. It's our fault for not being ready for the explosion of the transfer market, failing to chart a career path for them. Many of them are now just drifting."

Inter Milan's Stephane Dalmat, 23, is a case in point, moving from Lens to Marseille and then on to Paris before another move to Italy all in the space of four seasons.

Peter Luccin, 21, is another young star Fernandez sold after attitude problems, he has played at Bordeaux, Marseille, PSG and now Celta Vigo in the last three years.

The gritty Paris coach reserved sparkling words though for his 18-year-old Nigerian striker Bart Ogbeche who displaced Anelka from the starting eleven.

"Neither he nor his agent have asked me in over three months, he's a worker, respectful and I feel that is a context from which he'll find success. Others his age can think only of money and mock you when you try to give good advice," he said.

Capriati clinches HK Open

Tennis

AFP, Hong Kong

American ace Jennifer Capriati came from a set down to win the Hong Kong Ladies Challenge Saturday, finally overcoming Russian Elena Dementieva after a titanic struggle.

The 20-year-old Muscovite dominated for much of the match, and at one stage threatened to inflict an embarrassingly one-sided defeat on the reigning Australian and French Open champion, before Capriati dug deep to pull out a 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 win.

Revitalised Capriati, playing her first tournament after a winter break, had looked in vintage form all week as she confidently swept aside the challenges of rising Indonesian star Angelique Widjaja and South African veteran Amanda Coetzee en route to the final.

However, the powerful Dementieva, who reached the final after Mary Pierce retired with a hamstring injury on Friday, had been expected to provide the world No. 2 with her stiffest test yet -- and so it proved.

A stunned centre court at Victoria Park watched in amazement as the Russian, who took the silver medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympics, gave the muscular Capriati a dose of her own medicine, unleashing a string of spectacular forehand winners to leave the American a virtual spectator in the first set.

After exchanging early breaks, Dementieva cut loose with another thumping forehand to break for a 3-1 lead. A fifth double fault from a strangely lethargic Capriati gave the Russian a 5-1 lead and she served out convincingly to take the set 6-1.

"She came out really blazing and hitting the ball really hard and was doing to me what I was doing to my first two opponents," a relieved Capriati said after the match, adding that the switch from playing her first two matches at night to an afternoon match had also contributed to the first-set drubbing.

The American said she had not been surprised by Dementieva's brilliant play at the start of the match.

"I've practised with her a lot and watched her play a lot of matches so I know what she's capable of. I also know she's erratic ... and she'll make errors soon."

Capriati dug into her reserves to haul back the rampant Dementieva and bravely rescued the second set after falling a break behind.

"I had a little bit of a break in the second set ... she let up and started making some mistakes."

double fault but I was a little relieved I didn't have to play the last point," she said with a smile.

Capriati's win continues a love affair with this eight-player knock-out exhibition tournament that dates back to her victory over Martina Hingis in the 2000 final.

That victory sparked a stunning revival in form that saw her resurrect her troubled career to briefly become only the ninth woman to



PHOTO: AFP

American Jennifer Capriati holds aloft the winner's trophy after beating Elena Dementieva of Russia at the Hong Kong Challenge final on Saturday.

Although she could not stop the stream of winners flowing from Dementieva's racket, Capriati bravely broke the Russian in the sixth game of a thrilling final set to stay level and again in the eighth game after the Russian had broken for a 4-3 lead with a blistering forehand.

The American took the lead for the first time in the match when she held serve for 5-4 and took the title for the second time in three years when the Russian double-faulted for the ninth time on match point.

"You don't want to win on a

hold the No. 1 ranking on October 15 last year since computer rankings were introduced in 1975.

Capriati's form clearly outlines her as one of the favourites for the Australian Open, but she stressed that continued work on her fitness would be paramount in her preparation for the defence of her crown.

"We'll see how I fare in a real tournament next week. There's a little less pressure here so it's a little bit different."

Capriati will next join defending champion Hingis at the Sydney International ahead of the Australian Open in Melbourne.

Venus gets into the groove

Tennis

AFP, Gold Coast

World No. 3 Venus Williams gave her Australian Open chances a boost with a straight sets victory over Justine Henin at the Australian women's hardcourt tennis championship final here Saturday.

Williams cruised to her 20th straight win on the WTA circuit, beating the world No. 7 Belgian 7-5, 6-2 in less than an hour.

Defending champion Henin, who stretched Williams to three sets in last year's Wimbledon final, broke the Wimbledon and US Open champion in the first game of the match.

The tenacious Henin then saved four set points at 5-4 against the serving might of the big-hitting American, before Williams took the set in 40 minutes.

Williams broke Henin in the fourth and sixth games of the second set but the terrier determination of the second seed, who has risen from world No. 50 since last year's Gold Coast title win, broke back in the seventh game.

However, the nerves which have plagued 19-year-old Henin throughout the tournament reared in the final game as she served a double fault to hand Williams the title.

Williams celebrated her first tournament triumph since her US Open title win in New York last September.

Her 20-match winning streak began in the US last year, with wins in San Diego, New Haven and her memorable title defence at Flushing Meadows over sister Serena.

Williams has now set her sights on this month's Australian Open, one of the only two grand slams to elude her.

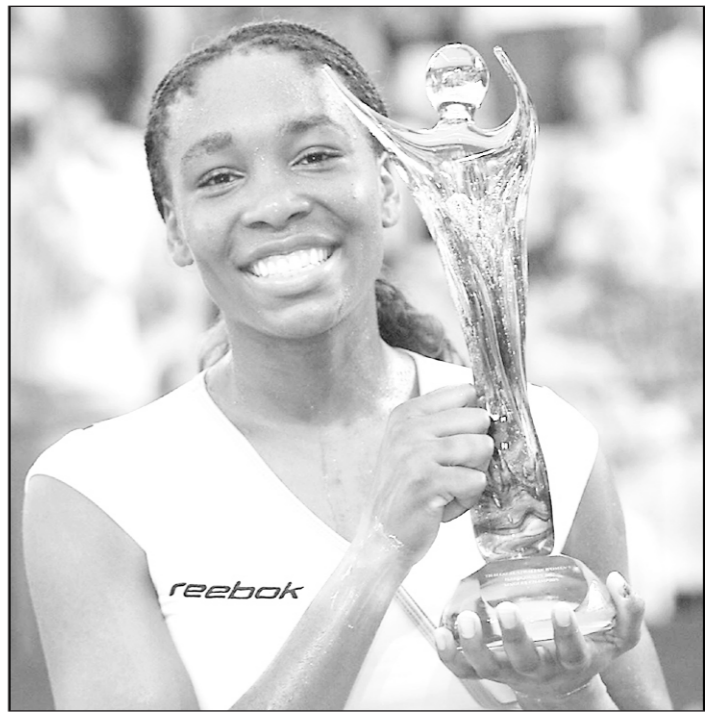


PHOTO: AFP

World No 1 Venus Williams of America shows the winner's trophy after defeating Belgian Justine Henin at the Australian hardcourt championship final on January 5.

Roeder's admission

Football

REUTERS, London

The lure of Manchester United could tempt Paolo di Canio to leave West Ham United, the London club's manager Glenn Roeder has reluctantly admitted.

"Sometimes you have to face facts -- any player would be highly flattered to be linked with Manchester United," Roeder told reporters at West Ham's training ground.

"Manchester United are arguably the biggest club in the world and it would be difficult to convince any player that they should not go there."

"It would be a blow if he went but whether you're a teenager or in your 30s, like Paolo, you have to put yourself in his boots."

Di Canio, 33, has been linked with a move to United this week but Roeder insisted that there had been no communication between the clubs.

"People from Manchester United should say what is exactly is going

on, if anything," he said.

"We have had no contact with United and at the moment no deal has been done in terms of a transfer fee -- and that means that Paolo cannot legally have talked to United, or anyone."

"I'm not accusing anyone of skulduggery but agents have too big a role in football these days."

Di Canio's agent Moreno Roggi was quoted in Friday's Times newspaper as saying that negotiations had taken place with United.

Di Canio is set to miss West Ham's FA Cup third round game at Middlesbrough on Sunday with what Roeder described as the combination of a tight hamstring and a cold.

The manager said he had not spoken to the player for several days.

Roeder said he expected the striker to be back in training next week and added: "My gut feeling is that he will be playing for us against Leicester City (next weekend)."

Some newspapers have suggested that Di Canio may move to United in a swap deal involving Dwight Yorke but Roeder was reluctant to say too much about out-of-favour striker.

"I think it's wrong to comment on

other players in public, but what I will say is that I've always enjoyed watching Dwight play," he said.

"Whether at Aston Villa or United he's been a star-turn."

Ferrero skips Sydney Int'l

AFP, Sydney

Next week's Sydney International tennis tournament was hit Saturday by the second withdrawal of a top-ranked player.

No. 1 Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero pulled out of the tournament with a knee injury, the same problem that forced out the women's top seed and world No. 1 Lindsay Davenport.

"He contacted tournament director Craig Watson and told us a knee injury was still giving him problems," a tournament spokesman said.

In the absence of the world No. 5, Frenchman Sebastien Grosjean, world No. 6, has assumed the top ranking of the Sydney tournament.

Smashnova bags Bank Classic

AFP, Auckland

Israeli Anna Smashnova picked up her third WTA tour title when she beat fifth seed Tatiana Panova of Russia in straight sets at the ASB Bank Classic women's tennis tournament here Saturday.

Smashnova, unseeded here and ranked 87 in the world, won 6-2, 6-2 in 74 minutes.

Panova, who played both her singles and doubles semi-finals yesterday, was clearly tired on court and was also upset by two controversial line calls which went against her in the second set.

However Smashnova gave her few opportunities. She stuck to her baseline game and broke Panova twice in the first set. In the second she recovered from an early break to reel off six games in a row to close out the match.

An excited Smashnova phoned her coach and parents in Israel to tell them of her win, only to discover the match had been televised live and they already knew.

"It just feels good to win," she said after the game.

"It was very, very windy, but it was windy for both of us so you just have to move your legs a little bit better."

"I was just concentrating on not hitting the lines too much, just trying to keep the ball in play more."

Smashnova, 25, was born in Belarus, but moved to Israel 11 years ago.

Injured in October, she spent November and December practising and working on her fitness, and said that had paid off this week.

Srichaphan in last four

AFP, Madras

Asian champion Paradorn Srichaphan of Thailand stunned second-seed Thomas Johansson of Sweden to storm into the semi-finals of the 400,000-dollar ATP Indian Open here on Friday.

The unfancied Thai rallied back after losing the first set to oust Johansson, world number 18 and the top-ranked Swede on the circuit, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Srichaphan, hoping to break into the top 100 this year after finishing the last season on 112, got a chance to play in the tournament only after Sergi Bruguera of Spain pulled out with a viral infection.

"This is one of the highlights of my career," said the 22-year-old, who takes on fourth-seed Andrei Pavel of Romania in Saturday's semi-final.

"Playing the second seed, I had nothing to lose, so I just went out there determined to give my best."

"It worked. The crowd was very supportive, I suppose they wanted an Asian player to win."

It is only the second time in his career that Srichaphan has reached the semi-finals of an ATP tour event, the first being at the Singapore Open in 1999.

The other semi-final will feature top-seeded Guillermo Canas of Argentina against Karol Kucera of the Slovak Republic.

Kucera fought off a determined challenge from third-seeded Fabrice Santoro of France before winning 6-2, 6-7, 7-6 after a marathon struggle lasting three hours.

El Aynaoui storms into Qatar final

AFP, Doha

Arab pin-up Younes El Aynaoui and Spanish clay court specialist Felix Mantilla will clash in the final of the Qatar Open on Saturday after easing through the semifinals here on Friday.

Moroccan El Aynaoui, the sixth seed here, made good on his promise to beat Rainer Schuttler of Germany by ousting the former Qatar Open champion 6-3, 6-4 in 80 minutes in front of a partisan Arab crowd.

Earlier, Mantilla booked his spot in the final after crushing last year's runner-up Bohdan Ulihrach of the Czech Republic 6-3, 6-1 in a listless match.

El Aynaoui, a finalist in Doha in 1996 when he lost to Czech Petr Korda, had said after his quarterfinal victory over Jiri Novak on Wednesday that he was keen to gain revenge over Schuttler who had beaten him in the 2000 semi-final at this desert venue.

"I am pumped up," El Aynaoui said.

"People here want me to win badly. I am here to gain some serious revenge on Rainer because he beat me two years ago."

El Aynaoui's determination showed as wrested control over Schuttler with a break in the sixth game of the first set and never looked back, profiting from his big serve and a cheering crowd.

The Moroccan started with a bang in the second set, breaking Schuttler in the first game, but the German fought back with a break of his own in the sixth to tie 3-3.

El Aynaoui, ranked 40 in the world, then broke the German in the ninth and held serve to close out the match.

Schuttler was not too disappointed with his performance.