

Ronaldinho goes Red!

Football GUARDIAN/SUN, Manchester

Manchester United emerged from a day of extensive negotiations with Paris St-Germain yesterday convinced they have all but finalised Ronaldinho's transfer to Old Trafford.

and is awaiting confirmation from Ronaldinho's advisers. PSG officials said last night it was "99.9% certain he will leave for Manchester".

After a year-long pursuit of the 23-year-old, Ferguson will hope the move happens sooner rather than later, preferably before Brazil play in the Confederations Cup in France later this month.

Kenyon is increasingly optimistic, PSG accept £9million, United will also reflect on a piece of sound business given that they were quoted £18million after Ronaldinho had starred in the World Cup last summer.

The arrival of one of the world's most high-profile players will ease the sense of disquiet among United's fans, who are growing increasingly resigned to the idea of Beckham being sold.

Kenyon's admission that he had spent Tuesday in London negotiating a £30million deal with Sandro Rosell, a representative of Laporta, has effectively ended the argument about whether United intend to sell the England captain.

It also enticed the first admission from Beckham's representatives that a move is possible. "He has said that he wants to stay with United," said Jon Holmes, the managing director of SFX.

"If the club alter their view - and it needs all parties to change their view - then, of course, everything is possible in football."

Kenyon also discussed the possibility of United signing Patrick Kluyvert with Rosell, although it is unlikely they will want him as well as Ronaldinho.

Ferguson sees Ronaldinho as the ideal partner to play just behind Ruud van Nistelrooy. Where that leaves Paul Scholes, who scored 20 goals from that position last season, remains to be seen

Peter Kenyon, United's chief executive, broke off from negotiating with potential buyers for David Beckham to spend the day in France hoping to conclude a deal that would make Ronaldinho the first Brazilian to play for the club. He has offered £9million (14.7-million-dollar) and, although PSG wanted a figure closer to £12million, Valencia and Juventus have been unwilling to follow up their inquiries by getting involved in an auction.

And Beckham's departure was virtually sealed as Real Madrid reportedly attempted to hijack Barcelona's bid for the England skipper.

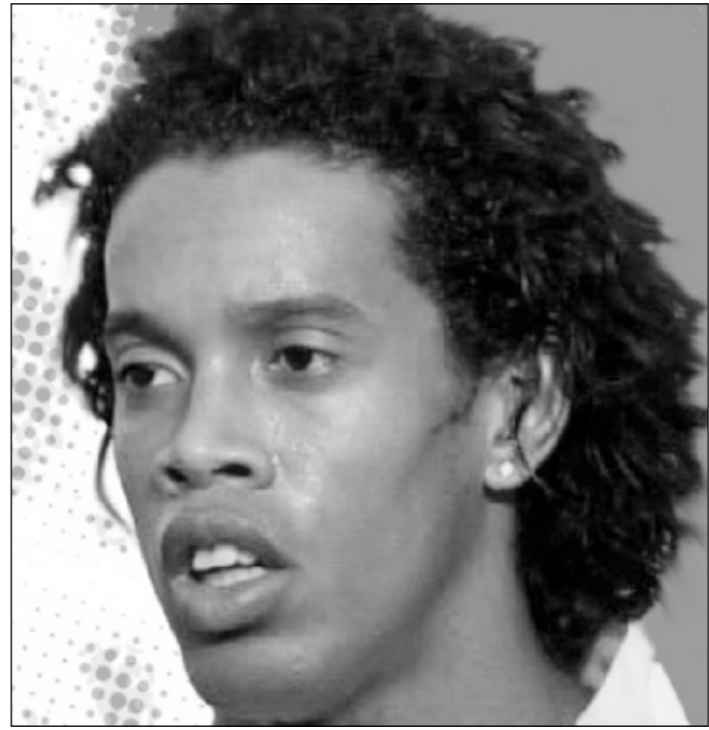
Real president Florentino Perez tried last night to contact Beckham on holiday in America to express their interest.

Perez insisted last month Real did not want Beckham - now he most definitely does.

Not least because he does not want their most hated rivals to secure such a big signing.

Also, he wants his good friend Lluís Bassat to win the Barcelona presidency vote ahead of Joan Laporta, who is behind the club's Beckham bid.

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, currently on holiday in southern France, was kept abreast of yesterday's events



RONALDINHO

RONALDINHO FACTS

REUTERS, Paris Factbox on Ronaldinho, who is negotiating a transfer from Paris St Germain to Manchester United: 1980 - Born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, on March 21. His full name is Ronaldo Assis de Moreira. Brother Roberto Assis is a former Brazilian international.

Lewis rules out Tyson rematch

BBC ONLINE, London

Lennox Lewis has ruled out fighting Mike Tyson again. WBC title holder Lewis, who faces Canadian Kirk Johnson in Los Angeles on 21 June, crushed the former champion in Memphis a year ago.

A clause in the contract for the first fight stipulated a rematch, but British-born Lewis believes Tyson is not keen to share a ring with him again.

"I won't ever fight Tyson again. That's over," said Lewis in a news conference.

"He's seriously scared of me. And his time has passed. He must have had dreams about the beating I gave him in Memphis last June."

Lewis has also admitted he might marry long-term girlfriend Violet Chang.

"That is something on the horizon," he said.

Something not in Lewis' immediate future is retirement from boxing - he revealed to BBC Sport on Wednesday his desire to stay at the top of the sport for a while longer.

"There's still a good year left in Lennox Lewis. I see pure pretenders out there, pure B-class fighters and I'm an A-class fighter. I'm five dimensional."

"Kirk Johnson has never seen a boxer like me so he's in serious trouble. If Johnson isn't scared of me, he should be. I've got an arsenal filled with punches that I could throw at any given moment."

"He has to make sure he is not a recipient of my best punches." Lewis is expected to defend his WBC heavyweight title against Vitali Klitschko by the end of the year.

But Canadian Johnson believes he will beat Lewis easily.

"The bottom line is, when I go into this fight, if I am doing everything right, it will be my easiest fight," said the challenger.

"If I use my quickness, footwork and speed, I will be ready to go 12 rounds with great success."

BCCSL polls today

Cricket REUTERS, Colombo

Former Sri Lanka cricket board (BCCSL) president Thilanga Sumathipala is favourite to return to the post after the first elections in three years on Friday.

The BCCSL has been managed by government appointed interim committees for 26 months after the decision to dissolve the last elected board, led by Sumathipala, on March 2001.

Sports Minister Johnston Fernando announced elections last month following widespread criticism of the interim administration and calls for the return to an elected body.

During the annual general meeting, registered cricket clubs and associations will select an executive committee through an open ballot system.

Captain of Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup winning team, Arjuna Ranatunga, is standing against Sumathipala for the presidency.

Sumathipala is the chairman of Sri Lanka Telecom and an experienced cricket administrator whose stated long-term personal ambition is to head the game's world governing body the International Cricket Council (ICC).

He was elected president on two previous occasions but both terms were cut short by the government following legal wrangles after a particularly ugly election in 1999 and in 2001 for allegedly violating the sports law.

Ranatunga, who is also a member of parliament, has struggled to win the support of key clubs during a low-key campaign that has focused

on the need to wipe out corruption. Sumathipala has threatened Ranatunga with a five million dollar lawsuit, accusing him of making defamatory comments to the media.

Previous elections have been marred by violence, intimidation and allegations of vote buying, prompting the government to beef up security this time around.

The director general for sports, Milton Amarasinghe, who is responsible for conducting the election,



THILANGA SUMATHIPALA

has said that 20 police officials will be on hand to ensure security.

The first priority for the new executive committee will be to secure a permanent replacement for coach Dav Wharmore.

The cricket board is also facing financial problems having announced a 93 million rupee (940,000 dollars) loss in 2002.

The board's finances have been further hit by a recent Singapore tribunal decision that it is liable to pay substantial damages after the cancellation of a multi-million dollar television deal in 2001.

Agassi landmark match at Queens

AFP, London

Andre Agassi will play the 1,000th match of his career at the Queen's Club after accepting a wild card into the 25th anniversary event which starts here Monday, organisers confirmed.

Agassi is the third former Wimbledon champion to take a wild card into the event, traditionally seen as a warm-up on grass for the All England Club next month, after Goran Ivanisevic and Richard Krajicek also accepted invitations.

"It's the 25th birthday of the Stella Artois Championships this year and I can't think of a better present for our spectators, viewers and sponsors," Tournament Director Ian Wight said Thursday.

Agassi's sparkling career has brought a complete collection of Grand Slam singles titles - achieved uniquely on three different surfaces - with his first of eight Majors coming at Wimbledon in 1992.

He last attended Queens in 2000 when he reached the third round.

Australian Open champion Agassi became the oldest world number one in the history of the ATP Entry rankings a day short of his 33rd birthday when he briefly displaced Lleyton Hewitt after winning in Houston last April.

The American is the current leader of the ATP Champions Race.

Agassi continued his impressive form in March when he won the tournament in Miami. He also made the quarter-finals of the French Open this week and is seen as a threat at Queens to defending champion Lleyton Hewitt, who is in pursuit of a record fourth straight title.

Down to serious business

UEFA EURO 2004 PORTUGAL REUTERS, London

Group-by-group analysis of the Euro 2004 qualification matches on June 7 and 11.

Group One Defending champions France have taken a firm grip on top spot up with a maximum 15 points from five games and are turning their attentions to the Confederations Cup.

The battle for second place remains tight with the two main hopefuls meeting on June 7. Slovenia, second on nine points, are away to Israel, third on seven.

Group Two At the exact halfway stage, four of the five teams involved could all still win the group and the next week throws up some key encounters.

Norway, leading on 10 points, make the short trip to Denmark (second on seven) before hosting Romania (third on six).

Fourth-placed Bosnia, also on six, could further muddy the waters when they visit Romania on Saturday.

Group Three The Czech Republic and the Netherlands, locked together on 10 points at the top of Group Three, each play once.

The Dutch visit Belarus on Saturday then sit back as the Czechs try to match them at home to Moldova - four games, four defeats - four days later.

Third-placed Austria (six points) must win away to Moldova and at home to Belarus to maintain their slim hopes.

Group Four In a group where Poland, Sweden and Hungary were expected to be fighting it out, Latvia are the surprise pacesetters on 10 points from four games.

Latvia visit third-placed Hungary (five points from four games) on Saturday.

Fourth-placed Sweden (five from three) have a chance to make ground when they visit bottom nation San Marino before hosting second-placed Poland (seven from four) on June 11.

Group Five On paper it looks tight with Germany, Scotland and Lithuania all on seven points, but in reality the group is Germany's for the taking despite their unimpressive performances in their opening three games.

The 2002 World Cup runners-up were held to a 1-1 home draw by Lithuania last time out after scraping a 2-1 home win over the Faroe Islands but have games in hand on their two rivals.

On Saturday they visit Scotland (played four), coached by Euro 96-winning German boss Bert Vogts, before the away return against the Faroes.

Lithuania (played five) are looking for revenge for a 3-0 defeat when they host Iceland on June 11.

Hockeyroos down Pakistan

Hockey AFP, Sydney

Striker Jamie Dwyer guided Australia into the final of a tri-nations men's field hockey challenge tournament here Thursday as the home side secured a 4-3 win over Pakistan at Homebush.

Dwyer scored three goals in a dominant display, including two in the space of three minutes midway through the second half.

In Thursday's second match, India beat Australia A 4-3.

Australia's senior side, who drew 3-3 with India the previous day, overcame a pre-match setback when Josh Hawes, nursing a hamstring injury, was ruled out, giving Robbie Hammond an unexpected call-up.

Hawes, who suffered the injury during the second half of Australia's clash with India, is a doubtful starter for the remaining matches this weekend, including Sunday's final.

Australian coach Barry Dancer was full of praise for Dwyer.

"Jamie has had a good series all-round and tonight was the highlight," said Dancer.

"There were younger players also who contributed tonight, players like Zain Wright, Liam De Young and Hammond."

Australia created several scoring chances and were able to get in behind the Pakistani defence throughout the first half.

The opening goal came in the eighth minute through midfielder Ben Taylor.

His goal was answered by Silwar Hussain less than a minute later as Pakistan took advantage of loose defending from the Kookaburras.

Australia continued to press and were rewarded again in the 19th minute with Liam De Young's pace down the left wing creating an overlap.

De Young bypassed Rehan Butt, scooted downfield and found Michael McCann deep in the left-hand corner, whose cross was met with an expert finish from Dwyer.

Pakistan began the second half in a rush, with Mudassar Ali Khan (39th minute) and Shakeel Abbasi (48th) scoring off a penalty corner rebound.

But with momentum swinging in Pakistan's favour, Dwyer turned on the magic with his second and third goals.

18 more sides

FROM PAGE 13 Bangladesh Rifles and Bangladesh Police, will also take part in the qualifying round that will be held in six zonal venues.

The service teams will play in the Seba zone while the 54 districts are likely to be split into five zones.

ACA's plan

FROM PAGE 13 by the eight-week World Cup campaign which came on top of our normal peak time of the year," he said.

"We are conscious of the need for players to now have a break. The only international cricket they face in the next four months is the Bangladesh series in Darwin and Cairns over 19 days from mid-July.

"We are also conscious of getting the right balance between player workload and the long-term playing programme, particularly for those players who play both forms of the international game."

"We are very conscious of the need for players to now have a break," ACB chief executive James Sutherland said in a statement on Thursday.

"We are also conscious of getting the right balance between player workload and the long-term playing programme, particularly for those players who play both forms of the international game."

Australia extended their world record winning streak in one-day internationals to 21 before losing the last three games in succession in the Caribbean.

"It (the schedule) just really got to the guys. We were all a bit tired and you just look at the way we played in those last three games. We were very sloppy," Ponting said.

Ponting's teammate Jason Gillespie was less enthusiastic about any call for a lighter schedule.

"I don't know if that's the answer," Gillespie told reporters at Adelaide airport.

"I'm a fast bowler, I just go out and bowl and get a game when I can. I've missed a lot of games (through injury) and when I'm fit I want to play."

Cricket coming

FROM PAGE 13 am sure that we will have a dialogue on that in the ICC (International Cricket Council) and ACC (Asian Cricket Council) meetings in London next week," Raja said.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has sought permission from its government to clear the two match series to break a deadlock in cricketing ties due to political tension.

South Africa last toured Pakistan in 1997-98 and won the three match Test series 1-0.

Ferrero holds his nerve

French Open AFP, Paris

Spanish third seed Juan Carlos Ferrero overcame Chilean 19th seed Fernando Gonzalez on Wednesday in a titanic tussle to reach the French Open men's singles semifinal.

Ferrero won 6-1, 3-6, 6-1, 5-7, 6-4 in 3hr 29min, and now faces defending champion Albert Costa, who earlier edged fellow Spaniard and 28th seed Tommy Spriano 2-6, 3-6, 6-4, 7-5, 6-2 in a struggle which also lasted three-and-a-half hours.

The 23-year-old Ferrero, desperate to end his quest for a first Grand Slam crown, fell to his knees at the end of a match which enthralled the centre court crowd.

"It was a really tough match," said Ferrero who embraced Gonzalez at the end of the match.

"He played superbly and showed all his qualities. And the fans were phenomenal throughout."

Those fans gave both men a standing ovation as they left the arena.

Ferrero reached the semis for the fourth time in a row here to emulate former greats Bjorn Borg, Mats Wilander, Ivan Lendl and Jim Courier.

He tore through the opening set in just 25min after breaking in the third game, Gonzalez not helping his cause with four double faults.

Then it all got far more difficult. Gonzalez had beaten Ferrero in the 1998 juniors final here as well as at last year's US Open and he soon settled down on the sun-kissed Philippe Chatrier centre court, breaking for a 2-0 lead and quickly

moving out to 4-1.

Serving for one set-all the 22-year-old Gonzalez, bidding to become only the second Chilean ever to reach a Grand Slam semifinal, Marcelo Rios having made the last four at the 1998 Australian Open, saved a break point before Ferrero misjudged to concede the set.

The third set saw Ferrero, who won the Monte Carlo Masters Series title and 25-2 on clay before his quarter-final, set out his stall as he mirrored his opening set showing with breaks for 3-1 and 5-1 to motor clear once again.

The wiry competitor, nicknamed Mosquito, appeared to be on the victory path with a break at the start of the fourth as Gonzalez threw in an 11th double fault but the Spaniard dropped serve immediately and both men then conceded again for 2-2 before games went with service to 5-5.

Gonzalez, frequently breaking the 200 kph barrier with his serve, held for 6-5, then moved to 40-15 for two set points despite Ferrero serving with new balls and the Chilean took it into a fifth set as a rash Spanish backhand flew into the tramlines.

Gonzalez then needed treatment for blisters on his right foot but was soon back on court to hold at the start of the fifth after saving a break point - Ferrero's conversion ratio just 25 percent as he missed his 19th of 25 break chances in the match.

The third seed, 6-2 lifetime in five-setters, held then broke at the third time of asking and, with Gonzalez visibly tiring, he held to love for 3-1.

A monster running forehand from the back court gave Gonzalez the break back for 3-3 - but Ferrero edged back into the lead at 4-3.

Brilliant anticipation at the net kept Gonzalez in the hunt but Ferrero kept his head, holding for a 5-3 lead.

He then served out for the match, adding to a 13th ace, winning on his sixth match point when Gonzalez fired long.



PHOTO: AFP

Spainiard Juan Carlos Ferrero jubilates defeating Chilean Fernando Gonzalez at the French Open quarterfinal in Paris on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes solution time: 26 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with clues and solution: E B P O D Y F B F C B W Y Y F B W