

And the story continues....

Football

AFP/REUTERS, London

English champions Manchester United have made a new bid to sign Brazilian World Cup star Ronaldinho, a Sunday newspaper has claimed.

According to the Sunday People, United have offered Paris St Germain 16 million pounds (26.1 million dollars) for the player with the fee rising to 19 million pounds (31 million dollars), depending on his appearances for the Old Trafford club and also the club's success in the future.

It was also reported that the 23-year-old will receive 25 percent of



RONALDINHO

the transfer fee as his part of the deal.

"Things are moving well and we are making useful progress," United chief executive Peter Kenyon told the paper.

"We have made a renewed bid for the player and are hopeful we can bring things to a successful conclusion in the next few days - that is certainly our intention.

"We believe Ronaldinho wants to come to Old Trafford and that has been a motivating factor for us in pursuing him.

"It's now a question of reaching agreement with PSG but we are

hopeful that will be done sooner rather than later."

Meanwhile, Barcelona are hoping for a prompt response to their bid for Ronaldinho from PSG, the Catalan club's sporting director Txiki Begiristain said on Sunday.

"We are waiting for a decision from PSG and the player," Begiristain was quoted as saying by the Spanish sports daily Marca on Sunday. "Our work is now done and the ball is now in their court."

Last week Barcelona president Joan Laporta said that the club had tabled a "firm and serious offer" for the 23-year-old Brazilian international.

Laporta was not prepared to give details of the offer, but Spanish media subsequently reported that Barcelona had offered 20 million euros (\$22.65 million) plus French defender Philippe Christianval and a loan deal for Argentine playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme in exchange for Ronaldinho.

But Begiristain made it clear that Barcelona, who tried to sign England captain David Beckham before his move to Real Madrid, were not prepared to wait indefinitely for an answer from the French club.

"When we were trying to sign Beckham we had a plan B to go for Ronaldinho. Now Ronaldinho is our plan A, but if we don't get him we still have other options," he said.

PSG have said that Manchester United, Chelsea and Real Madrid have all also expressed a strong interest in signing the highly rated young forward.

In behaviour reminiscent of his Brazilian international teammate Ronaldo when he was pressuring to leave Inter Milan before the start of last season, Ronaldinho has failed to turn up to his club's pre-season training camp and has remained in Brazil while his future is resolved.

The French club have said he will be punished for his absence but may be forced into negotiating his departure from the club if they cannot persuade him to join his team mates at the start of next week.



PHOTO: AP

The US wall of (L-R) Pablo Mastroeni, Brian McBride, Clint Mathis and Bobby Convey thwart a free kick from El Salvador's Gilberto Alfredo Murgas (No 18) at Foxboro, Massachusetts on July 12.

Bright USA start



REUTERS, Foxboro, Massachusetts

Goals by Eddie Lewis and Brian McBride helped the United States open the defense of its CONCACAF Gold Cup title with a 2-0 defeat of El Salvador Saturday.

In the earlier match, Canada upset Costa Rica 1-0.

USA 2; EL SALVADOR - 0

The U.S. controlled much of the lackluster game and was unlucky not to have scored twice inside the opening 10 minutes when goalkeeper Juan Gomez saved from Earnie Stewart before Pablo

Mastroeni crashed a shot off the crossbar.

Lewis broke the deadlock in the 28th minute when the midfielder's right-footed shot from 15 yards beat Gomez. He nearly added a second a minute before the interval, but his chip went just over the bar.

The U.S. then silenced the mostly El Salvador supporting crowd of 33,652 when McBride added an insurance goal 14 minutes from time when he headed in a cross from substitute Steve Ralston.

It was McBride's 21st goal in his 69th appearance and moved him into third on the all-time scoring list for the U.S.

Sunderland midfielder Claudio Reyna, who missed eight months through a knee injury, made his first international start since the World Cup and impressed during his 60-minute stint before being replaced by Clint Mathis.

"It was a good win," said U.S. coach Bruce Arena. "We made it more difficult than we had to."

"We had some good chances in

the first half, but I think El Salvador is much improved from the team we saw a year ago. It was a good team effort."

CANADA 1; COSTA RICA -

In the earlier game, a second-half strike by Paul Stalteri gave Canada a shock 1-0 victory over Costa Rica.

Costa Rica, ranked joint 18th in the world - compared to Canada's 78, dominated most of the Group D match but failed to take its scoring chances, especially in the second half.

It paid the price when a composed Canada side snatched victory with Stalteri's 59th minute strike on the break.

Midfielder Jason Bent made a run down the right flank, Costa Rica defender Luis Marin failed to control his cross and Stalteri surged through to beat Ricardo Gonzalez from 18 yards.

"We truly got off to a good start today," said Stalteri. "This takes a lot of pressure off of us."

"Hopefully we can wrap our group up and avoid the U.S. in the

quarterfinals."

The goal followed a series of missed chances by Costa Rica.

Walter Centeno, put through by Leonardo Gonzalez, could only graze the right post, while striker Winston Parks broke through on the right side, only for his angled shot to be parried by goalkeeper Lars Hirschfeld.

Parks then failed to beat Hirschfeld again from just eight yards after collecting the ball from Rolando Fonseca, while the ensuing counter-attack led to Stalteri's goal.

"Obviously it was a very frustrating day for us," said Costa Rica coach Steve Sampson. "I thought we created enough chances to win the game."

"Unfortunately when you lack precision in front of goal, you give the opponent the opportunity to win the game."

The seventh edition of the 12-nation tournament also features Guatemala, Cuba, Jamaica, Honduras, Mexico, Martinique and South American invitees Brazil and Columbia.

Best not at his best!

Football

REUTERS, London

Former Manchester United and Northern Ireland winger George Best was arrested after a pub brawl at the weekend amid reports that he has started drinking again.

His wife Alex, 30, told The Mail on Sunday: "No one wants to be an alcoholic and I'm sure George didn't want to start drinking again. But he said he has been finding it so difficult."

She added: "The last week has been hell. He seems to be on a mission to self-destruct and it's getting worse."

Best, 37, was detained along with a 31-year-old man at the Chequers Hotel in Walton-on-the-Hill near his home about 30 km south of London.

Police said the pair were arrested on suspicion of assault and taken to Reigate police station but released without charge.

"No further action will be taken," a Surrey police spokeswoman said.

The News of the World said on Sunday that Best had become involved in a brawl at the hotel with one of its photographers. On its front page, a picture showed Best getting into a police car.

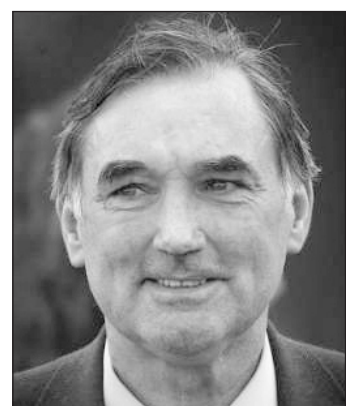
Best had a 10-hour liver transplant operation a year ago after decades of alcohol abuse. Following the operation he deflected criticism that there may have been more deserving cases, saying his condition was not self-inflicted but the result of a disease.

In recent interviews, Best, who

works as a TV soccer analyst and newspaper columnist, had vowed not to drink again, talking of the new lease of life the operation had given him.

Born in Belfast in 1946, Best captivated the football world in a sparkling 10-year career at United from 1963 to 1973, inspiring them to their 1968 European Cup triumph.

He was European Footballer of the Year that season but a hectic showbusiness lifestyle -- he was dubbed 'the fifth Beatle' -- took its toll on one of the game's most gifted players.



GEORGE BEST

He announced his retirement in 1972, but returned to football the following year, playing for clubs such as Fulham, Hibernian, Stockport County, Cork Celtics and Dunstable Town.

He also had spells with American clubs the Los Angeles Aztecs, Fort Lauderdale Strikers and San Jose Earthquakes until he finally hung up his boots in 1983.

Howard United bound

Football

AFP, Foxboro, Massachusetts

United States and MetroStars goalkeeper Tim Howard is to be transferred to Manchester United for an expected 2 million-dollar fee, Major League Soccer and the English Premiership champions are to announce on Monday.

"It's great for me," Howard said Saturday after what was likely his final game with the MetroStars - a 3-3 draw with the New England Revolution. "I have to work hard to continue to prove myself. Not many people get this opportunity."

Howard said he was informed Friday he received his permit - and a spot on the team - by Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson. "It was great to hear that."

The widely expected transfer hit a snag earlier this month when Manchester United was forced to appeal Howard's work permit because the 24-year-old was ruled ineligible.

For a foreign player to take a spot in England, he must have played in 75 percent of his country's national team games in the past two years.

Howard has been capped nine times by the United States and started all three matches in this summer's Confederations Cup in France.



TIM HOWARD

"We went in on appeal and got it," Howard said. "It was great because I didn't qualify."

Howard's transfer is one of the few million dollar deals made by MLS. He joins keeper Brad Friedel (Liverpool, 1997), midfielder Joe-Max Moore (Everton, 1999) and striker Stern John (Nottingham Forest, 1999).

Howard was mobbed by his USA teammates Saturday as they took the field against El Salvador in a Gold Cup match.

Howard is scheduled to undergo a physical Monday in England, sign the papers, then return to the US on Wednesday to join Manchester United for its American tour. He can make his debut with the club on July 22 against Scottish club Celtic in Portland, Oregon. MetroStars coach Bob Bradley said the move was bittersweet.

"We're very excited for Timmy. He has given so much to the Metrostars on and off the field," Bradley added.

Roy's heart with Bayern

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Deportivo Coruna's Dutch international striker Roy Makaay says he hopes the Spanish side will agree terms with German champions Bayern Munich so that he can join a side capable of winning the European Cup. Makaay, who was top scorer in the first division last season with 29 goals, has said he does not intend to renew his contract with Deportivo when it expires in two years and expects the club to cash in by selling him before next season.

"I don't want to let this opportunity pass me by," he told Radio Voz

in an interview on Friday. "I want to advance my career."

Newspapers have reported that Bayern have made an offer of 15 million euros (\$16.99 million) for the Dutch striker, who helped himself to four goals in Deportivo's two victories over the German side in the opening phase of last season's Champions League. But Deportivo club president Augusto Lendoiro, who met the Bayern commercial manager Uli Hoeneß in Madrid last week, said that the Bundesliga side's offer was "a long way off what we are asking for."

Despite Bayern's poor showing in last season's Champions League when they made a surprise exit in the first group stage, Makaay believes that joining the German side would improve his chances of European success.

"The fact is that Bayern, together with Real Madrid, are the two strongest sides in Europe and are always going to be fighting to win the Champions League. That makes them a very attractive team for me."

"It is also an attractive offer for Depor because by selling me they are not strengthening a direct rival in the Spanish League."

Makaay, who joined Deportivo from Tenerife in 1999, has scored 79 league goals in his four seasons at the Galician club.

Deportivo finished third in the first division last season but, unlike Bayern, they will have to play a qualifying tie in order to make it through to the Champions League proper.

Veron the big one?

Football

GUARDIAN, London

Juan Sebastian Veron will become Chelsea's latest multi-million pound signing when he leaves Manchester United this week. United will accept Chelsea's offer of about £14 million - half the sum they paid when they signed the Argentine midfielder from Lazio in 2001.

Sources at Old Trafford and an insider involved in the deal both confirmed that the move was likely to be completed this week. The agent behind the move is thought to be Pini Zahavi, who is rapidly becoming the most influential man in his field.

Zahavi, an Israeli, is very close to Sir Alex Ferguson and Chelsea's new owner, Roman Abramovich. It was Zahavi - also a friend of Sven-Goran Eriksson - who brokered the deal in which Abramovich, a Russian billionaire, gained control of Chelsea earlier this month. Zahavi has a South American arm of his agency, one of whose directors has worked with Veron from very early in his career.

Since Abramovich's takeover Chelsea have already signed Geremi, the Cameroon international midfielder, for £6.9m from Real Madrid, and full-back Glen Johnson for £6.1m from West Ham. Offers for the Irish striker Damien Duff and England left-back Wayne Bridge are also reportedly on the table, and Veron, 28, will not be the last newcomer before the new season starts in mid-August.

Veron's best form of his career has come under Eriksson, now the England manager. The Swede signed him for Sampdoria - Veron's first European club at the age of 21 - and then at Lazio.

Veron, who spent five years in Serie A, was one of the key players for Eriksson's Lazio team when they won the Italian title in 2000. He joined United two summers ago but has never been able to recapture his best form.

Veron's fee was then a British record of £28.1m, and despite repeated criticism of the deal



JUAN SEBASTIAN VERON

Ferguson has always been publicly supportive of his player. Now he appears to have recognised that it is time to cut his losses, and will have more money to spend on rebuilding the team at Old Trafford.

Gallas undecided

Football

AFP, London

French international defender William Gallas said Saturday he was still not certain to stay at Premiership outfit Chelsea despite the millions being shelled out on new players.

However the 25-year-old's hopes of earning a big money move to Spanish giants Barcelona looked to have been dashed as their vice-president told the BBC that with Chelsea's financial situation secure since the arrival of new owner Roman Abramovich it was unlikely he would be let go.

"We were in discussions over Gallas just before the Russian guy brought Chelsea," Sandro Rosell told the BBC.

"But it looks like it is out of the question. They have no money needs now and so far

from what we have been told they will not let him leave the club."

Earlier on Saturday Gallas had expressed his desire to leave the club if not enough new players were brought in to cope with the four competitions they are involved in for the upcoming season (three domestic competitions and the Champions League).

"I got confirmation about the interest from Barcelona, now their officials and my agent should have had a meeting," the former Marseille star told the Daily Star.

"It will all depend on Chelsea's reinforcements, which will play in four competitions this season."

"I want to win something and I hope I can do so with Chelsea, but the door is not closed."

"The proposition from other clubs should be very attractive to me."

However Gallas, who can also play at right back, said he would not take a final decision until he returns from a holiday.

Gallas's Barcelona hopes looked to have been ended in any case when earlier this week they bought Mexican international central defender Rafael Marquez from Monaco.

Should Barcelona opt to re-ignite their interest they would have

to offer 7.5 million pounds (12.2 million dollars) or more owing to a clause in Gallas' contract when he signed from Marseille for 6.2 million pounds in 2001.

Gallas may well be satisfied, though, when he comes back as Abramovich has already paid 15 million pounds for Real Madrid's Cameroon international midfielder Geremi and West Ham's young full-back Glen Johnson.

He has also purportedly tabled a 15 million pounds bid for Blackburn Rovers star Ireland winger Damien Duff.

Chelsea not giving up on Duff

AFP, London

Chelsea believe a 15-million-pound (24.5-million-dollar) bid for Blackburn's Irish winger Damien Duff will see him join Stamford Bridge next week, the Daily Mail reported on Saturday.

The 24-year-old has also been linked with Premiership champions Manchester United, runners-up Arsenal and Champions League aspirants Liverpool.

Blackburn said they had already turned down a 13-million-pound bid but Chelsea, now owned by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich, are expected to up that to 15 million pounds this week-end, enough, the paper believes, to see Duff make the move south to London.

Duff can talk to clubs willing to pay 17 million pounds, because of a clause in his contract.

Blackburn chief executive John Williams said: "The clause was written in when Damien signed a new four-year contract last year. It is true that we have turned down two bids from Chelsea as we are very keen to keep Damien at Ewood Park."

"Once the figure is reached, the matter is out of our hands and the decision is Damien's to make."

"I can only repeat that we very much want him to stay with us and hope our recent success and qualification for the UEFA Cup will encourage him to do precisely that."

Taffarel wants to go on

Football

SW, Parma

The Brazilian goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel said that he wants to keep on playing and is not thinking about getting retired even though he is 37 years old.

"I want to keep on playing because I don't want to get retired yet, so I could maybe accept to be the third or fourth keeper of Parma. If I don't find another solution in the next days I could accept Parma's offer," said Taffarel.

Taffarel played the last two championships as the reserve keeper of Parma, where he had played before in 1990 and 1993.

"Two years on the substitutions bench has been too much but I don't have any intention in getting retired because I still feel in shape for playing some more time."

Parma has offered Taffarel a one year contract but if he accepts he will be the third or fourth keeper of the team.

"I am thinking about what Parma has offered me and if I don't get another solution in the next days I could maybe accept it."