



FERNANDO MORIENTES

Morientes to know next week

Football

INTERNET SOURCE

Real Madrid supremo Florentino Perez has left the fate of Liverpool target Fernando Morientes in the hands of new coach Wanderley Luxemburgo.

Morientes, one of Europe's top strikers last season while on loan at Monaco, has returned to the Bernabeu and found himself behind Ronaldo, Raul and Michael Owen in the pecking order.

The Spanish international's agent, Gines Carvajal, told PA International on Monday: "I had a meeting with the Real Madrid president (Perez). He's asked us to

wait as he wants to know what the new coach decides, if he's still counting on Fernando Morientes, or if the player will leave.

"By next week, we should have confirmation."

Liverpool and their Spanish coach, Rafael Benitez, have been strongly linked with the player.

He would not be available to play for the Anfield outfit in the Champions League though.

"We have not started any negotiations as of yet, but it's true that there are many clubs who have phoned us to seek information about Morientes," Carvajal said.

"But the probable destination is either the Premiership or France because it's impossible for him to stay in Spain."

It's just pneumonia!

Football

AFP, London

Former England star Paul Gascoigne is recovering in hospital from pneumonia but his agent on Sunday denied the 37-year-old was seriously ill.

"The situation is that Paul is in hospital and he has got pneumonia," Alex Armitage told the Press Association.

"That is about it really, it is no big deal. He has pneumonia, which makes you feel awful, but he does not have a collapsed lung, he does not have excess fluid on his lungs and he does not have three heads.

"The doctors say he will be able to leave hospital by the middle of the week. It's pneumonia, not black-water malaria!"

Gascoigne was admitted to Princess Grace Hospital in London several days ago after complaining of feeling unwell.



PAUL GASCOIGNE

Beattie Everton's

AFP, London

Everton hope to parade record six-million-pound signing Jamie Beattie at Goodison Park on Tuesday before the home clash with Portsmouth after the Southampton striker James Beattie completed a medical at Goodison Park on Monday.

Beattie, who joined the Saints from Blackburn in 1998 and scored 76 goals in 233 appearances, had also been targetted by Aston Villa.

But Villa manager David O'Leary revealed a row between his chairman Doug Ellis and Southampton chairman Rupert Lowe over an alleged illegal approach last summer led to talks over Beattie breaking down.

O'Leary said Lowe had played tit-for-tat.

"I can't control that," he added.

Everton will try to get their season back on track against Portsmouth after their 5-2 thrashing by Spurs on Saturday.

Over-partying Brazilians

AFP, Lisbon

European champions FC Porto will suspend four of their Brazilian players, including teenage playmaker Diego, after they failed to return on time from their Christmas holiday.

Diego, along with striker Derlei, defender Pepe and winger Maciel, were banned from training with the rest of the squad on Sunday, club spokesman Acacio Valentim, told national news agency Lusa.

The four were due back at club headquarters on Friday but Diego, Pepe and Derlei only showed up at training on Sunday while Maciel, whose brother has reportedly been shot in Brazil, has not returned.

"It is not right to be late but we are going to talk now to see what can be done," Derlei told TSF radio.

Meanwhile, Sporting Lisbon are still without their Brazilian striker Liedson, the leading scorer in the league with 12 goals, who has yet to return from his vacation in Brazil.

He was due back on Tuesday.



ROBINHO

Real get their man?

Football

INTERNET SOURCES

Real Madrid were reported on Monday to have beaten Chelsea in the race to sign Brazil's latest superstar footballer Robinho.

Sports daily AS said the 20-year-old, under contract with Brazilian first division side Santos, the club who discovered Pele, until 2008, would join the Spanish giants next July in an 18 million euro deal.

Real's appointment as coach of Wanderley Luxemburgo, who had just steered Santos to the Brazilian crown, was said to have been decisive in Robinho choosing Madrid

rather than London.

English Premiership leaders Chelsea had regularly been reported to be on the verge

Luxemburgo has lavished praise on Robinho.

"He is a great player. I think that he is the best one in Brazil, but to play in Europe an adaptation is needed," said Luxemburgo. "It is important to do things calmly. It is necessary to speak with him first."

Robinho's agent, Wagner Ribeiro, also said: "His relationship with Luxemburgo is excellent, as much off as on the pitch, but as yet there is nothing to talk about. It is necessary to hope."

Meanwhile, AC Milan's Brazilian

fullback Cafu is pleading with coach Carlo Ancelotti to fight for the whizkid.

Two-time World Cup winner Cafu said on Monday: "Whoever snaps up Robinho will be making the deal of a lifetime."

"He is a great champion who really can make the difference in any team."

Cafu also recommended Figueirense defender Pinquito to Milan.

"I definitely suggest that we rush to buy a young Figueirense lad called Piriquito."

"He is a right-back with good feet and real pace. He's not the new Cafu, as he runs a lot more than me!"

Gunners on midfielder search

Football

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has confirmed he could enter the transfer market this month for a midfielder if Brazil international Edu moves abroad.

The Arsenal boss is also waiting for an update on Gilberto Silva's fitness, with the Brazilian set to return to Highbury on January 10 after recuperating in South America from a back injury.

But if Gilberto's return is delayed and Edu - who is out of contract this summer and has been linked with a move to Spain - agrees a new deal elsewhere, Wenger will have to find a replacement.

Mathieu Flamini was ruled out of the New Year's Day win at Charlton through injury, leaving Patrick Vieira and Cesc Fabregas as the club's only two fit central midfielders.

"Gilberto comes back on January 10, so we will check him then. If he is not fit and Edu decides to go, then we will be short," Wengersaid.

"But I am not looking for another goalkeeper."

Manuel Almunia has yet to be on a losing side since Wenger surprisingly replaced Jens Lehmann a month ago and has kept four clean sheets in six

Premiership games.

Wenger's biggest immediate concern is over the fitness of Sol Campbell for Tuesday's game against Manchester City at Highbury.

Campbell twisted his ankle in his side's 3-1 win at Charlton, being replaced by Philippe Senderos with six minutes left.

With Pascal Cygan still out with a back injury, 19-year-old Swiss defender Senderos may be handed his first Premiership start against City.

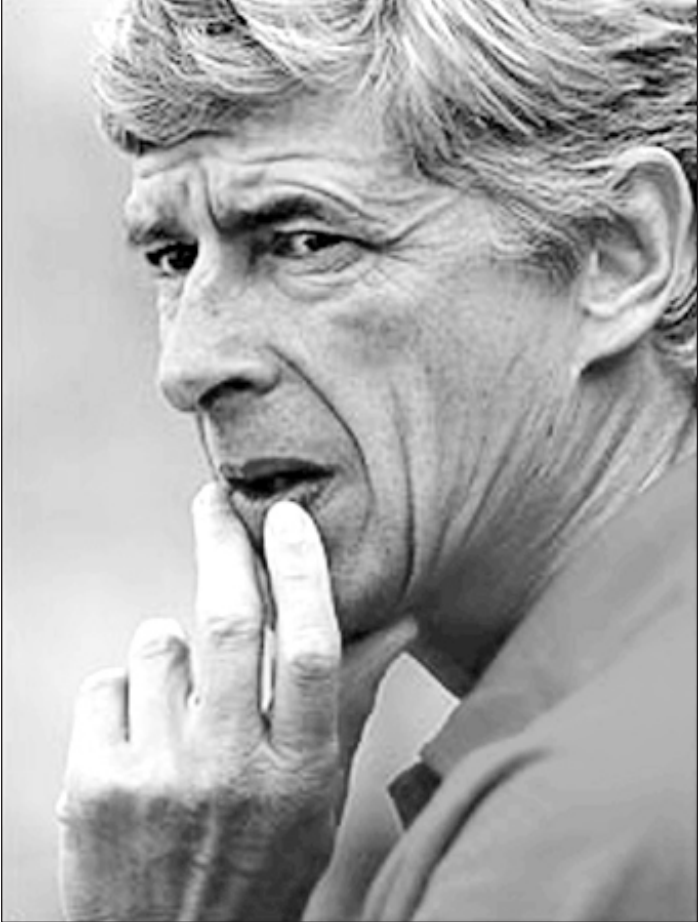
"Sol has turned his ankle and I am scared that he will make our team even younger for the next game," Wengersaid.

"Pascal Cygan is back to normal training but he will still be too short, so if Sol cannot play, then I think it will be Senderos."

Wenger may at least have right-back Lauren available to return after a knee injury, although Justin Hoyte impressed at The Valley in only his second league start.

"Lauren has a good chance of being back, although I feel that Justin Hoyte did very well," added Wenger.

Dennis Bergkamp also faces a fitness test to see whether he has recovered from injury. Robert Pires will return to the starting line-up but Jose Antonio Reyes is still ruled out.



ARSENE WENGER

AFC annoyed with Tiger Cup brawl

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) on Monday expressed "deep disappointment" over an unruly Tiger Cup semi-final match between Singapore and Myanmar in which three players were sent off.

Singapore advanced Sunday to the Tiger Cup final with a 4-2 victory in extra-time over Myanmar in an ill-tempered match that saw three Myanmar players shown red cards and some of their supporters arrested for an attempted pitch invasion.

AFC general secretary Peter Velappan, in a letter to the ASEAN Football Federation (AFF), said they were upset with the poor sportsmanship.

"We are also extremely displeased with the attitude of the players as well as the Myanmar team officials," he said, urging the AFF to ensure that remaining teams in the competition uphold and respect the rules of fair play.

The AFC has also requested the AFF to submit a report on the organisation of the Tiger Cup following claims of poor security at Jakarta's Senayan Stadium during the December 28 semi-final between Indonesia and Malaysia, and match fixing allegations during group matches in Vietnam.

Alonso woes for Liverpool

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's Spanish midfielder Xabi Alonso added to the Premiership side's injury woes when it was confirmed on Sunday he will be out for up to six weeks after breaking his ankle during Saturday's 1-0 defeat against Chelsea.

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez admitted that the 23-year-old's injury - which stemmed from a foul by Frank Lampard - was a major loss.

"We've lost Xabi for five to six weeks. It is a big blow," Benitez told the club's website.

Alonso has been a huge success since arriving from Real Sociedad for 10.5 million pounds last summer, scoring twice in 23 appearances.

Alonso joins a lengthening injury list of attackers including Australian international Harry Kewell (groin), Czech striker Milan Baros (hamstring) and long-term injury victims Baros's compatriot Vladimir Smicer (knee) and French

international striker Djibril Cisse (broken leg).

Benitez would not reveal whether he would spend any money in the January transfer window, though Real Madrid's Spanish international striker Fernando Morientes has been linked with them.

"We will see," Benitez said. "We have a good squad so we have players who can come into midfield."



XABI ALONSO