

Magpie Owen?

Football

AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle manager Graeme Souness is still hoping to give the St James' Park fans and his depleted team a boost with the arrival of Real Madrid striker Michael Owen.

It emerged yesterday that 25-year-old Owen, who has been linked with several English Premier League clubs of late has not totally ruled out joining the Magpies.

And as he prepared his depleted squad for Sunday's Barclays Premiership opener at Arsenal, Souness was quietly confident.

"Without exciting the fans too much, I think there is a good chance,"

he said. "We are still in there. We are targeting, and have been targeting, several players. The Michael Owen situation, we know everything about Michael's situation - he is a target, but we also have other targets."

Newcastle have spent the summer desperately trying to replace the departed Craig Bellamy and Patrick Kluivert, so far with little success, and Owen is one of several men to have attracted their interest.

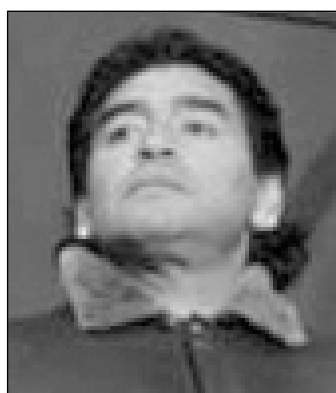
But at the end of a week in which they officially ended their pursuit of Fenerbahce's Nicolas Anelka and admitted they remain in the race to sign Fulham's Luis Boa Morte, it is the link with Owen which is causing a buzz on Tyneside.

Manchester United have denied

they are ready to bring Owen back to England, although after losing Wayne Rooney to Sir Alex Ferguson's side last August despite making the pace, the Magpies would not be at all surprised if competition develops in that area, while a return Liverpool has also been mooted.

Souness will travel to Highbury with only one fit specialist striker available - captain Alan Shearer has shaken off a calf injury - with Shola Ameobi suspended and Michael Chopra recovering from knee ligament damage.

The transfer window closes at the end of this month, leaving the Scot less than three weeks to strengthen his squad.



The King and the God face off

Football

XINHUA

Brazilian soccer legend Pele will be the guest of honor in the new television program of ex-soccer star of Argentina, Diego Armando Maradona on Monday, local press said Wednesday.

"The King in the night of God," reads an advertisement published on the main dailies of Buenos Aires, which promotes the reunion of two of the best soccer players in history.

Local press said that the program hosted by Maradona and former goalkeeper of the Argentine national soccer team Sergio Goycochea will also be graced by ex-Argentine star Gabriel Batistuta,

the top scorer in the history of his country's national team, ex-tennis Gabriela Sabatini and Italian actress Maria Grazia Cucinotta.

In spite of public polemics of last years, Pele will meet Maradona again, as was the case in the tribute match dedicated to Maradona in late-2001 at Boca Juniors Stadium.

In addition to interviews, the program will have entertainment, with a scheduled time for the start of the show, but not for its end.

Sources of Channel 13 through which Maradona's show "La Noche del 10" will be aired say the former player of the national soccer team could also invite pop music personalities like Bono or Mick Jagger, the leaders of U2 and Rolling Stones, respectively.

Real tribute for the original Galactico

Football

BLOOMBERG, Madrid

David Beckham and Ronaldo, among Real Madrid's \$300 million soccer players are raising money for one of the Spanish club's original stars.

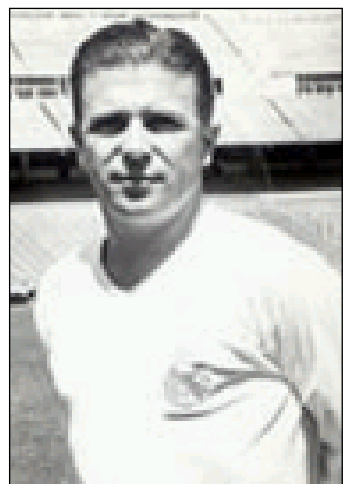
Real Madrid, Europe's record nine-time soccer champion, is in Budapest to play an exhibition game Aug. 14 against the national team, in honor of Ferenc Puskas, Hungary captain in the 1950s and a Madrid striker as the club dominated the continent.

Puskas, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease, "was Madrid's Hungarian Galactico," said Eduardo Pena, 75, a Real Madrid director from 1995 to 1999 who also witnessed Puskas's nine-year stint on the Spanish team, in a telephone interview. "We were astounded by his technique, fantastic left foot and powerful shot."

Puskas, 78, entered soccer history by captaining the first foreign team to beat England at its home stadium in London, in 1953, and then helping Real extend its European winning streak after joining the club in 1958 following his defection from communism. The Budapest-born goal-scorer was named among the 10 best players in history by FIFA, world soccer's governing body.

His former Real teammates will

also be at the Ferenc Puskas stadium in Budapest to watch the match. They include Alfredo di Stefano, whose three goals to Puskas's four led to the 7-3 defeat of Eintracht Frankfurt and the lifting of the 1960 European Cup in Glasgow



FERENC PUSKAS

in front of 130,000 people.

Proceeds of the match will go to pay Puskas's healthcare bills. Puskas himself may be unable to attend the match due to his ill health, Gyorgy Szilvassy, a spokesman for the Hungarian football association, said in a phone interview.

Two-thirds of 45,000 tickets for

the game, starting at 7 p.m. local time, were sold on the first day and a "few thousand" remain. Real Madrid will hold an open practice the day before for fans who can't attend the game, Szilvassy said.

"It will be a gala, Real will show off their silky skills," said Zoltan Korpas, 34, a recruitment consultant who is attending the match.

"Puskas was a phenomenon, a football genius. He was a scoundrel in the good sense and has become a historic figure," he said in a telephone interview.

Sports daily Nemzeti Sport published stories about the match every day for the past two weeks. Nepszabadsag, Hungary's largest-circulation political newspaper, had 14 articles since the game was announced June 21.

To Hungarians, Puskas is best known for leading the squad called the "Aranycsapat" or "Golden Team," after winning the 1952 Olympics. A year later they beat England 6-3 in London before winning 7-1 in the return match in Budapest in 1954, still England's heaviest ever defeat.

Puskas's 83 goals in 84 appearances for Hungary was the most prolific record in international soccer until last year. Iran's Ali Daei now holds that honor, with 87 goals. Pele of Brazil had 77 international goals in his career.

Robinho plans farewell

Football

XINHUA

Vila Belmiro Stadium is the place from which Robinho wants to say goodbye to Santos and start his life with Spanish club Real Madrid, said the 21-year-old player on Wednesday.

The expected farewell of Robinho will take place in the Santos-Figueirense match of the Brazilian Championship, three days before the date which is the official farewell of the young striker.

Robinho, according to the official announcement, would play his last

match with Santos, versus Paysandu, at Belem, on Aug. 24.

"Nothing against the people of Belem, but I would very much like to say farewell at Vila Belmiro. To tell the truth I don't like farewells, but I expect to return to Santos in the future," said the striker.

Robinho signed a five-year contract with Real at the end of last month when Santos finally agreed to accept a 30 million US dollars offer from the Spanish giants.

However, the deal between the two clubs included a clause that allows the slightly built forward to play a handful of league matches with Santos before joining Real on August 25.

Gatlin's golden double

Athletics

AFP, Helsinki

Justin Gatlin's explosive performance in adding the 200 metres world title to his 100m one led a dominant night for the United States at the World Athletics Championships on Thursday.

The 23-year-old 100m champion led a one-to-four finish for the Americans in the 200m; Tyson Gay the unfortunate one of them to miss out on a medal.

Gatlin was joined on the top tier of the podium by compatriots Michelle Perry in the 100m hurdles and Walter Davis, who went from failing to qualify for the 2003 triple jump final to champion this time round.

The Americans also saw all four of their men's 110m hurdles semi-

finalists reach Friday's final with evergreen four-time champion Allen Johnson just one race away from becoming the first ever track athlete to win five titles in the one event.

However, for one American the day ended in tears of despair as Olympic 100m hurdles champion Joanna Hayes saw her hopes of claiming the world title crushed when she clattered into the penultimate barrier and finished last.

It wasn't all America's night as 37-year-old German discus thrower Franka Dietzsch reclaimed the title she won in 1999 and The Netherlands Rens Blom stunned more highly-rated rivals by winning the pole vault.

For Gatlin, though, it was further confirmation that right now there is nobody to touch him as he assumes the mantle of compatriot Maurice Greene in being the dominant force in sprinting.

Indeed he is just one title away from emulating Greene in winning three world titles at the same championships.

He is in the 4x100m relay and aside from dropping the baton - which previous US teams have done - they look unbeatable.

"Double gold means I'm king of the sprints. It shows I'm the best sprinter around," said Gatlin.

"Two down and one to go."

His compatriot, silver medalist Wallace Spearmon, the fastest man in the world this year, summed the race up in a nutshell.

"It's the first time I've raced for second place," said the 20-year-old who edge John Capel into the bronze.

Hayes' woe was Perry's delight as the 26-year-old's decision to forgo the heptathlon - she was fed up at not being able to beat Swedish superstar Carolina Kluff and Frenchwoman Eunice Barber - paid off handsomely.

"I felt when I woke up this morning that I was going to win," said Perry.

"This is a dream come true. In the morning I decided my tactics would be to be as daredevil as possible and go for broke. It paid off because I didn't hit a hurdle and I was so focussed I didn't even notice Joanna falling."

Hayes emerged sad but gracious.

"I hit it pretty hard," said the 26-year-old, who came close to breaking the longstanding world record when she won the Olympic title.

"I bruised my knee but it's okay. I thought I was going to be a threat but it didn't work out for me. I have felt better but I guess this will pass me by."

Davis jumped a season's best of 17.57 metres to take the title and the 27-year-old, who will attempt to double up in the long jump, admitted he had felt all along this would be his year especially as the master of the event Christian Olsson was absent through injury.

"I kept looking at my watch as I thought all year this was my time," he said.

For the most part, though, there was just one performance that stood out and that was Gatlin's and he shows no signs of stopping and resting on his laurels.

"I am here to make history," he said.



American Justin Gatlin celebrates after winning the 200m gold at the 10th IAAF World Athletics Championships in Helsinki on Thursday.

Barca's Super chance

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

After ending a six-year trophy drought by winning the Spanish title last season, Barcelona are hoping for more silverware when they meet King's Cup winners Real Betis in the Spanish Super Cup.

The traditional curtain-raiser to the Spanish season is a two-legged affair with the first game in Seville on Saturday (kickoff 2000 GMT) and the return at the Nou Camp a week later.

"I'm really keen to win this trophy as no one in the present squad has ever won it," said midfielder Xavi. "It would be a great way to start the season and would give us a major boost in morale."

Barcelona lost the Super Cup after winning the league in 1998 and 1999, but won it in 1996 when as runners-up in the King's Cup they beat double winners Atletico Madrid 6-5 on aggregate.

They needed extra-time to beat Betis the last time the two sides met in

a final in the 1997 King's Cup and the Andalusians have continued to be a hard nut to crack.

Last season Betis were the first team to defeat Barca in the league with a 2-1 victory in November and they were unlucky to be held to a 3-3 draw at the Nou Camp in April.

Betis, who are coached by former Barca boss Llorenç Serra Ferrer, have already got the first competitive match of the season under their belt.

They earned themselves a deserved 1-0 first-leg win at home to AS Monaco in the third qualifying round of the Champions League thanks to a last-gasp strike by Edu.

The Brazilian forward is hoping his side can produce a similar performance against the league champions on Saturday.

"Like the Monaco game, the important thing is for us not to concede a goal because I'm sure we will have chances to score in the second leg," he said.

"If we can play against them like we did last season then that will be great, although it's going to be very difficult because of the quality of

players they've got."

Barcelona will be missing versatile centre-back Rafael Marquez, who is on international duty with Mexico, while midfielder Thiago Motta, Dutch left back Giovanni Van Bronckhorst and new signing Santi Ezquerro are all injured.

The club's other new recruit Mark van Bommel should be given his first competitive outing since signing from PSV Eindhoven.

After missing the Monaco match with a minor ankle problem and resolving a contract dispute with the club, Betis's leading striker, Ricardo Oliveira, should be back for Saturday's match.

The powerful Brazilian, who notched up 22 league goals in the 2004-05 season, scored in both matches against Barca last term and is hopeful his side can begin the present campaign the way they finished off the last.

"It is a great opportunity for us to win another trophy especially after ending last season on such a high with our victory in the Cup," he says.

Awe-stralia!

AFP, Sydney

Leg-spin great Shane Warne has shown remarkable resilience to become the first player to take 600 Test wickets, Cricket Australia said on Friday.

The 35-year-old Australian spin wizard became the first bowler to reach the landmark during the first day of the third Ashes Test against England at Old Trafford on Thursday.

Cricket Australia led the tributes to Warne's achievement in a career spanning highs and lows.

"To become the first player in Test cricket history to reach 600 Test wickets is an outstanding achievement," CA chief executive James Sutherland said in a statement.

"Shane has shown he is not only one of the greatest spin bowlers of all time, but he has shown remarkable resilience to come back from serious injuries and time away from the game."

"Shane has been a major contributor to the amazing success of the Australian cricket team over the past 14 years."

Australian chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns said the skill of Warne he admired most was his ability to alter the amount of spin he puts on his leg-break.

"It's freakish," Hohns, himself a former Test leg-spinner, told the Sydney Daily Telegraph. "I defy anyone to say he is not the greatest spinner who has played the game."

Warne's landmark was warmly applauded by former Australian Test paceman Geoff Lawson.

"It's almost beyond my comprehension how someone could take 600 Test wickets. I know how hard I had to work to get 187," Lawson said.

"It is a tribute to his craftsmanship and I thought it was great that he got it at Old Trafford. The setting was perfect."

AFRO-ASIAN SERIES Rahul, Sanath also drop out

AFP, New Delhi

Rahul Dravid of India and Sanath Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka on Friday withdrew from next week's one-day series between Asia and Africa, sending the already troubled inaugural event into a tail-spin.

The star duo joined a steady parade of cricketers to opt out of the made-for-television series to be played in the South African venues of Centurion, Pretoria on April 17 and Durban on April 20 and 21.

Indian cricket board secretary Karunakaran Nair said Dravid had withdrawn for unspecified personal reasons, while Jayasuriya wanted to recover from a shoulder injury sustained during the recent tri-series in Sri Lanka.

Nair did not say who will replace the seasoned pair.

An Indian player not selected for the Asian team said he had no regrets about missing the event.

"It's a waste of time," he told AFP. "I am better off staying at home and preparing for the season ahead."

The series, the brainchild of Indian cricket supremo Jagmohan Dalmiya and accorded official status by the International Cricket Council, has been put together to raise funds for the development of the sport in both continents.

Brothers demand

FROM PAGE 12

clean football even though we had started the return league with a three-point deficit than Mohammedi, he claimed.

Mobasser demanded the three clubs to withdraw their protest letters and apologise for baseless allegation.

Fakirerpool-3,

FROM PAGE 12

The winners took an early sixth minute lead through a Rony right-footer from the top of the box that kissed the net before taking a deflection off defender Tareq.

But it was Dipali who enjoyed a 2-1 lead at the break after goals from Ugandan striker Idris who headed home Azad's right-side cross to equalise in the 26th minute while Rizvi found the net after seven minutes later also with a header to stun their opponents.

In the second half Youngmen's pressed hard to get back on level terms and eventually Robin capitalised in the 55th minute while Ripon netted the match-decider in the 73rd minute.

FROM PAGE 12

problem throughout the campaign. Perhaps they could solve it by bringing an unsettled Michael Owen back from Spain before the first transfer window closes on August 31.

ANFIELD ON RED ALERT

Rafael Benitez could look back at his first season with mixed feelings. Yes, he masterminded the Reds' fairytale ending in Istanbul but that was small consolation for a yet another dismal league campaign. Liverpool finished fifth, a massive 37 points behind champions Chelsea.

While UEFA debated whether European nights would return to Anfield (which ultimately they did) the shrewd Spaniard was moulding a team he could call his own.

Out went many of the rejects inherited from Gerrard Houllier and instead Benitez snapped up 16-goal Peter Crouch from relegated Southampton, got experienced winger Boudewijn Zenden for free and added a couple of Primera Liga villarreal among them talented Villarreal shot-stopper Jose Reina and hard-tackling Momo Sissoko from his previous employers Valencia.

The Liverpool manager rates Sissoko highly and believes the 20-year-old Mali international could eventually become a better player than Vieira was.

But Benitez knows that while earning European glory has endeared him to the fans, his real task nevertheless is winning the Premiership. If somehow he can close the gap on the top two, it would be considered as a first step in the right direction. He will also be praying that none of his key personnel suffer long-term injuries as was the case with Djibril Cisse and Xabi Alonso.

DUTCH DELIGHT FOR SPURS

The battle for the mid-table positions will focus on Tottenham Hotspur, who

attracted Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids, Middlesbrough, Aston Villa, Bolton Wanderers and an Everton side that confounded everybody including the blue half of Merseyside, by finishing ahead of their great rivals.

GOODBYE SOUNESS

Newcastle United manager Graeme Souness in probability is going to be the first casualty of the season.

On the other hand, Man City now under full-time manager Stuart Pearce aim to consolidate. Apart from bringing proven strikers Darius Vassell from Villa and Andy Cole from Fulham, he can even call upon Bradley Wright-Phillips, the younger brother of Shaun, to seize an opportunity which something he has already done in pre-season.

Although there is not much to choose from between Blackburn Rovers and Birmingham City, it will be interesting to see how bad boy Craig Bellamy gets on at Rovers.

LEGENDS OF THE FALL

The Premiership welcomes back West Ham United and Sunderland.

The Hammers, led up front by ageless Teddy Sheringham, has the tough task of inspiring teammates like Rio Ferdinand's younger brother England under-21 defender Anton to perform on the biggest domestic stage. However, ex-Republic of Ireland boss Mick McCarthy will certainly get a frosty reception from Roy Keane when Sunderland visit Man United. The pair didn't see eye-to-eye during the 2002 World Cup finals and it eventually led to Keane's expulsion from the squad.

THE STRUGGLERS

For new boys Wigan Athletic, better known as rugby's heartland, life in the top-flight will be shortlived for obvious reasons. There will be no great escape act performed by Fulham and Bryan Robson's West Bromich

Albion this time. Both are prime relegation candidates.

Mid-mannered Alan Curbishley may have to rethink what else he can do more for Charlton Athletic.

Portsmouth too face real problems, not because of the abilities of new manager Alain Perrin but the loss of the goal-scoring talents of Yakubu and the creation of Patrik Berger.

FIXTURES

Saturday (1400 GMT unless stated):
Aston Villa v Bolton Wanderers, Everton v Manchester United (1145 GMT), Fulham v Birmingham, Manchester City v West Bromwich Albion, Middlesbrough v Liverpool (1615 GMT), Portsmouth v Tottenham Hotspur, Sunderland v Charlton Athletic, West Ham United v Blackburn Rovers
Sunday: Arsenal v Newcastle United (1230 GMT), Wigan Athletic v Chelsea (1500 GMT)



Did U Know?

Greece failed to score in the 1994 World Cup finals.



Maria Sharapova
(Russian tennis star)
"Being there for a week would give me pride, but not as much as staying there for the long term."
On being world number one.

Australia lose Langer

FROM PAGE 12

Lancashire home crowd after his man-of-the-match winning display during England's two-run 1-1 series-levelling victory at Edgbaston, where he made key scores of 68 and 73 as well as taking seven wickets.

Bell though failed to add to his overnight score, caught behind by wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist off Lee.

Experienced West Indies umpire Steve Bucknor took his time over the decision and, although replays suggested Bell might have missed the ball, England were now 346 for six.

Meanwhile Flintoff, got off the mark with a four to third man off Lee, cut fellow quick Glenn McGrath - wicketless after missing the second Test with an ankle injury -- for another boundary.

Australia-raised Jones, much criticised for his keeping but in the side mainly for his batting came to the crease after managing just 46 runs in four previous innings this series.

But together with Flintoff he ensured a regular supply of boundaries with Gillespie, whose one for 114 made him the most expensive member of Australia's attack, bearing the brunt of the assault.

But Flintoff, four short of his fifty, holed out to Langer at mid-on off Warne having faced 67 balls with seven fours.

Next over, Jones missed Gillespie's slower ball and was bowled to end a 51-ball stay with six boundaries.

Worryingly for Australia, batsman Michael Clarke remained off the field for Friday with the back injury that saw him miss most of the first day's play.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the third Test between England and Australia at Old Trafford on Friday:

ENGLAND: First innings (overnight 341-5)
Trescothick c Gilchrist b Warne 63
Strauss b Lee 6
Vaughan c McGrath b Katich 166
Bell c Gilchrist b Lee 59
Petersen c sub b Lee 21
Hoggard b Lee 4
Jones c Langer b Warne 46
Giles b Gillespie 42
Giles c Hayden b Warne 0
Hamison not out 10
Jones b Warne 0
Extras: (b-4, lb-5, w-3, nb-15) 27
Total: (All out in 113.2 overs) 444
Fall of wkts: 1-26, 2-163, 3-290, 4-333, 5-341, 6-346, 7-433, 8-434, 9-438.

Bowler O M R W
McGrath 25 6 86 0
Lee 27 6 100 4

Gillespie	19	2	114	1
Warne	33.2	5	99	4
Katich	9	1	36	1

AUSTRALIA: First innings
Langer c Bell b Giles 31
Hayden not out 33
Ponting not out 7
Extras: (lb-1, nb-1) 2
Total: (For 1 wkt in 20 overs) 73
Fall of wkt: 1-58
To bat: Martyn, S Katich, Gilchrist, Clarke, Warne, Lee, Gillespie, McGrath.

Bowler	O	M
R	W	
Harmison	3	0
15	0	
Hoggard	6	2
22	0	
Flintoff	5	0
20	0	
S Jones	3	1
3	0	
Giles	3	1
12	1	

No point

FROM PAGE 12

"We return on August 23 and leave for Sri Lanka on August 25. But I am not worried with the schedule because I believe this is the prime time for my cricket and I want to play as much as possible."