

Juve in for Beckham

INTERNET, undated

Juventus are challenging Inter for the opportunity to pick up David Beckham on a free transfer at the end of this season.

This week has already seen reports that the Nerazzurri view him as the perfect replacement for Luis Figo when the Portuguese international is expected to move on next year.

However, this morning Turin-based newspaper 'Tuttosport' has splashed its front page with claims that Juventus could tempt the ex-England captain away.

Curiously, the article is less of a report on actual events than an advice column for the Bianconeri directors, urging them to enter the fray.

Beckham's contract with Real Madrid expires in June 2007 and he is still flanked by dozens of sponsors, although other stories have linked him with a switch to the high-paying LA Galaxy.

His season has been fraught with difficulties, most notably with Coach Fabio Capello, who has made it clear the former Manchester United man is not a part of his plans.

'Tuttosport' also list the transfer objectives they believe the Bianconeri are already actively working on, such as German internationals Torsten Frings and Miroslav Klose -- the striker also a target for Roma.

Palermo's Andrea Barzagli and Milan hitman Alberto Gilardino are also named, while the Rome-based 'Corriere dello Sport' suggest that Inter benchwarmer Walter Samuel, West Ham's Argentine midfielder Javier Mascherano and Bordeaux's young talent Rio Antonio Mavuba are on the cards too.

Hildebrand staying put

INTERNET, undated

Germany number two goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand has flatly denied reports that he will leave Stuttgart to join Bundesliga rivals Hamburg next season.

The 27-year-old custodian's contract expires in the summer, making him a free agent at the end of the current campaign.

Preliminary talks over a new deal with Stuttgart are due to take place before Christmas but he would be entitled to negotiate with other clubs in January.

Reports on Friday suggested that Hamburg, who have been warned off Schalke's Frank Rost, have made a move for Hildebrand.

"That is complete rubbish," Hildebrand told Stuttgart's official website.

"I am sick of having to comment on speculation each week. I have already made my situation clear to (the club) and I am sticking to that."

"As far as I am concerned, there is nothing else to say."

Hildebrand has been with Stuttgart since the age of 16 and is currently the club's undisputed number one goalkeeper.

Club WC expansion on the cards

AFP, Tokyo

The end-of-year Club World Cup may be expanded from six to eight teams to include a side from the host nation, a senior FIFA official said on Saturday.

Organising committee president Viacheslav Koloskov said the idea was under discussion to boost interest in Japan, which will also host next year's tournament.

"The FIFA executive committee is aware there is definitely room for reflection in this respect. We've had a suggestion to increase the number of teams to eight, and that would include a team from the host nation," Koloskov said.

"It's a very complex task. We're looking for a solution which would maintain the prestigious nature of the event on the one hand, but also allow us to include the host nation."

Koloskov also confirmed the 2007 tournament would be played in Japan, which hosted the inaugural competition last year.

"We initiated a tender process to check whether there was another country capable of staging an event like this. However, any new applicant would have to offer the same excellent conditions," he said.

"For example, the stadiums must rate as world-class."

The Club World Cup featuring the champions of Europe, South America, Central and North America, Africa, Asia and Oceania kicks off on Sunday.

It has replaced the traditional fixture between the European and South American title-holders played since 1960.



PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar drives the ball during his unbeaten knock of 32 in his 50th match as captain during the fifth ODI against Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Saturday.

Rome in derby fever

INTERNET, undated



In one of the most eagerly anticipated matches on the European, indeed world calendar, Lazio meet Roma in the season's first Derby della Capitale on Sunday evening.

The Stadio Olimpico will once again be the setting as these two old foes go head-to-head in a match that, this time round, could have serious implications for the scudetto race.

Roma, led by on-form captain Francesco Totti, are hard on the heels of leaders Inter -- who travel to Empoli earlier in the day -- and have definite title aspirations this season.

Six consecutive wins for the Giallorossi have seen Luciano Spalletti's side keep to within four points of the defending champions and, since Palermo's recent fall-away, Roma now seem the only team capable of dethroning the

Giuseppe Meazza outfit. And with Totti bang in form, another three points on Sunday in this, the most bitterly contested of derbies is very much a possibility.

After a penalty brace against Atalanta last weekend, Totti now leads the scoring charts and Roma fans will be looking to him to return to the derby fray -- he missed last season's fixture with a broken ankle -- to inspire the team against their cross-town rivals.

Like Totti, Di Canio is Rome-born and bred and has also enjoyed his fair share of derby heroics, but come Sunday, the now Cisco Roma player will have to be content with watching the game from the stands.

How Lazio will cope without his motivation or who they will turn to for inspiration remains to be seen, but much will depend on the contribution of captain Massimo Oddo, who

has been the subject of a degree of transfer speculation recently.

Stefano Mauri returns to the Lazio starting line-up after having served a suspension, but there are doubts hanging over Pasquale Foggia after the striker injured his ankle in last week's defeat -- Lazio's first in six outings -- against Fiorentina.

Roma meanwhile, as is the norm over recent seasons, have a host of fitness problems to contend with.

Gilberto Martinez, Matteo Ferrari

and Alberto Aquilani all miss out through injury, whilst Ricardo Faty will spend another three weeks on the sidelines.

In other action on Sunday,

under-pressure Milan, fresh from

yet another disappointing result in the Champions League midweek, welcome Torino to the San Siro whilst Fiorentina travel to Verona to face Chievo.

Elsewhere, Atalanta play

Messina, Cagliari clash with Parma

and Udinese travel to Sicily where

they go up against Catania.

Mourinho dismisses Gunners

AFP, London



Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho is convinced Arsenal will pose a significant threat to his plans for Premiership domination until they sacrifice their purist principles.

While Mourinho's side need to win against the Gunners at Stamford Bridge on Sunday to keep the pressure on leaders Manchester United, they will not fear a prolonged title challenge from north London.

Arsenal are capable of playing some of the most attractive football in Europe when they are functioning at their best.

But too often they are frustrated by opponents who bully them out of their stride and that fatal flaw has cost the Gunners any chances of winning the Premiership.

Defeats at Manchester City, West Ham, Bolton and Fulham, as well as four home draws have left Wenger's men 16 points behind leaders Manchester United.

And Mourinho, who is bidding to win a third consecutive title with

Chelsea, believes that will remain the case as long as Arsene Wenger does not address his side's lack of steel.

"We are a team adapted to the reality, which is why Arsenal cannot win at Bolton and why Chelsea under me have played three matches and got three victories at Bolton with zero goals conceded," Mourinho said.

"My feeling is that some teams and some managers play every game with the same philosophy, with the same game principles and with the same game strategy.

"Sometimes they beat someone 6-0 and sometimes they lose a game they shouldn't lose."

"Arsenal were pretty when they were champions without defeat, yes. But not pretty when they finish fourth, not pretty when they had to win their last game to qualify for the Champions League."

One of the most intriguing aspects of a match rife with potentially explosive sub-plots will be how well Ashley Cole performs against his former club.

England left-back Cole left Arsenal in the most bitter circumstances in August after his relation-

ship with the club's directors deteriorated beyond repair.

Chelsea eventually prised Cole from Arsenal for 20 million pounds plus William Gallas and the defender can expect a hostile reception from the 3,000 Arsenal fans at Stamford Bridge.

It has been reported that Cole, nicknamed 'Cashley' by supporters after his contract row, will be greeted by Gunners fans waving English pound notes with his face printed on them.

Wenger holds no grudges against the player he helped develop into one of the best left-backs in the world and he said: "My relationship with Ashley is okay. He has gone to Chelsea in special circumstances that have been talked about a lot."

"But don't forget he did well at this club and you must respect that. In the end he got the move to Chelsea he wanted."

If Arsenal are to become the first team to win a Premiership match at Stamford Bridge since Mourinho took charge in 2005, they must find a way to subdue Didier Drogba.

The Ivory Coast striker has

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Henry slams Cannavaro

INTERNET, undated

France striker Thierry Henry has accused Italy defender and Ballon d'Or winner Fabio Cannavaro of "valuing nothing" and being an unworthy champion. The Arsenal man claimed the Real Madrid centre-back deliberately impeded him during the World Cup final, which Italy won on penalties.

"In Berlin Cannavaro put me out of the game in the first minute," Henry fumed. "It is clear he did it deliberately and great defenders don't behave in this way."

France lost the final on penalties, leaving Henry with a trophy-less season despite making it to the Champions League final with Arsenal.

"We were 50 metres from goal," he continued. "I left the ball and he pretended that he didn't see me coming. He did the same thing with (Franck) Ribery during France-Italy at the Stade de France (during the Euro 2008 qualifier, which France won 3-1.)"

"For me a great defender must not play like this in such a big game;

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United go nine clear

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United scored nine points clear at the top of the Premiership after a comfortable 3-1 victory over neighbours Manchester City at Old Trafford on Saturday.

First half goals by Wayne Rooney -- the 50th top-flight goal of his career -- and French international Louis Saha provided the platform to pile the pressure on reigning champions Chelsea, who face Arsenal in Sunday's London derby.

Cristiano Ronaldo sealed victory six minutes from time after Tunisia international Hatem Trabelsi had reduced United's lead.

United, chasing their first title since 2003, are now unbeaten in 12 league games after taking 32 points out of the last 36 on offer.

Mid-table City, who finished with 10 men after Bernardo Corradi was red-carded in the last minute, were

seeking their first win in 23 league visits to the venue yet Stuart Pearce's side were the victims of their own downfall as they were punished for three glaring defensive errors.

There was never any question of the outcome once Rooney, who was outstanding, broke the deadlock with just six minutes on the clock after pouncing on an uncharacteristic mistake by Sylvain Distin.

The French defender failed to cut out a cross by Ronaldo which allowed Rooney to slide home his eighth Premiership goal of the season.

Pearce was forced to reshuffle his pack at the interval with Weaver unable to continue because of a dead leg and Claudio Reyna damaging his hamstring.

Stephen Ireland forced van der Sar into a flying in the 49th minute but United should have extended their lead further.

However, Saha could only fire over from close range after City's Swedish substitute keeper Andreas Isaksson had beaten away an effort

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PHOTO: INTERNET
Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney (L) goes airborne at the tackle from Manchester City's Sylvain Distin during their Premiership match at Old Trafford on Saturday.