



Aston Villa goalkeeper Stuart Taylor (R) is beaten despite his best effort against Sheffield United during their Premiership match at Bramall Lane on Monday.

## Real to resume Higuain talks

INTERNET, undated

River Plate representatives will travel to Spain this week to resume negotiations over the transfer of Gonzalo Higuain to Real Madrid. The 18-year-old, currently the subject of an international tug of war between Argentina and France, has been publicly targeted by Madrid president Ramon Calderon. Several rounds of negotiation have already taken place with no fee being agreed, and it is believed the Spanish club will have to up their present 12 million euro (8 million pounds) bid to land their man. "We received an invitation from Real Madrid to travel to resume negotiations, which we accept and when we arrive we will recommence talks," said River treasurer Hector Grinberg.

## Big guns in for Milito chase

INTERNET, undated

Genoa claim a host of top clubs are interested in their striker Diego Milito, who is currently in the second season of a two-year loan at Real Zaragoza. They say both Milan giants and Catalan giants Barcelona have all put their hats into the ring in the chase for his signature. The Spanish side have an option to buy Milito in June, but Genoa say they want more than the 5 million euros (5 million pounds) offered and there are plenty of other clubs ready to take him. The Argentinian currently plays with his brother Gabriel at the Liga outfit and has enjoyed a jet-propelled start to the season with ten goals in 12 games. Genoa president Enrico Preziosi said they would not accept a cut-price deal for the 27-year-old, telling El Mundo Deportivo: "The present value of Diego Milito to Genoa has changed. "We have to review the issue because €5 million is not enough, and this week we'll discuss the matter with Zaragoza. "Inter and Milan are interested in Milito and in the Spanish league Barcelona want to buy the player too."

## Adu moves to salt Lake

AFP, Washington

Freddy Adu, the most recognisable name in the Major League Soccer, was traded Monday to Real Salt Lake after three seasons with DC United. Adu, 17, twice was named an MLS All-Star -- in 2004 and 2006 -- and helped DC United capture the 2004 MLS Cup during his rookie season. United dealt Adu and the rights to goalkeeper Nick Rimando to Real Salt Lake for a major allocation, the rights to goalkeeper Jay Nolly and future considerations. The Ghana-born 17-year-old may play just one season in Utah. Adu has often expressed a desire to play in Europe but will not be eligible to play for a club outside the United States until he turns 18 on June 2. Adu had a two-week trial with English powerhouse Manchester United at the end of November. After the trial, Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson praised Adu and said they would monitor him with the possibility of signing him when he turns 18. In 87 career appearances with DC United, Adu has scored 11 goals and notched 17 assists.

# Baros saves Villa

INTERNET, undated



Sheffield United's second half fightback claimed a 2-2 draw with a similarly resilient Aston Villa at Bramall Lane on Monday night. Stilian Petrov opening the scoring inside two minutes for the visitors but second half goals from Stephen Quinn and Danny Webber saw the match turned on its head. The winning position was all too brief for The Blades, though, as Milan Baros completed Villa's second quickfire strike of an engaging contest. The visitors had made a stunning start by claiming a 76-second lead through Petrov's first goal for the club. After Chris Sutton had seen his shot blocked, Petrov stole in to rasp an emphatic half-volley into the back of the net. Buoyed by that lightning raid, Villa took a firm grip of the match with Sutton a commanding presence, as the hosts were forced into firefighting action. Villa's support had seen little to worry them although United pro-

duced a flurry midway through the half when set-pieces twice unsettled goalkeeper Stuart Taylor. Even then chances were few and far between for the hosts -- a wild deflection on Phil Jagielka's long-range shot saw the ball land on the top of the net in the 27th minute. Villa carved out two more opportunities before the 45-minute mark. Sutton's header was only a fraction out as it struck the frame of the goal, while Paddy Kenny twice denied Gary Cahill after a right wing cross by Petrov. United's only genuine chance of the half arrived at its conclusion, but Rob Hulse stabbed his shot wide when the ball broke kindly for the striker on the edge of the area. With Neil Warnock's half-time teamtalk once again ringing in their ears -- United invariably step-up their attacking assault in the second half of matches -- the hosts built up a sizeable head of steam which took just five minutes to bear fruit. Quinn's volley from Rob Kozluk's cross had already been blocked by Olof Mellberg and the 20-year-old was not to be denied his first senior goal as, from a near identical position to his earlier effort, he volleyed his team level. Hulse's powerful header was clasped impressively by Taylor on the hour as United continued to call the shots. On 64 minutes it brought more tangible reward -- Keith Gillespie's short corner was headed into the centre of goal by Chris Morgan and Danny Webber flicked his finish past Taylor. Remarkably the lead lasted just 56 seconds. Villa had been suppressed by their all-action hosts, but latching on to a cross Sutton again caused consternation in the hosts' defence and Baros took a touch before flashing a shot home for his first goal in eight months. Back came United who were foiled no fewer than four times in a goalmouth scramble 12 minutes from time. Taylor repelled Hulse's header, while substitute Christian Nade, twice, and Hulse could not force the rebound through a sea of Villa bodies. The respite lasted all of 30 seconds -- Quinn's shooting expertise forced a parry from Taylor as United sought a third goal. A winner appeared odds on, but Petrov's ingenuity from a stoppage time free-kick failed to deceive Kenny and both teams had to settle for a hard-earned point.

## Cech eyes Jan return

AFP, London



Petr Cech, the Chelsea and Czech Republic goalkeeper who suffered a fractured skull during a match in October, is hopeful of returning to training in the middle of January, he said on Tuesday. Cech, who suffered the horrific injury in a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt on October 14th, has been advised by his doctors that the fracture will take another month to fully heal. The 24-year-old has however already resumed gym work and has been playing tennis while no longer suffering from the fatigue associated with the injury. "Last week I spent a whole day in Oxford with the surgeon for some consultations and some tests," Cech said. "We are still waiting for the report from that but as far as I am concerned, we are looking very positive and very well. "Especially the brain is working

very well and I haven't lost anything I had so for the moment it is looking very well. "There is still time to go with the skull fracture because it has not healed and I have to be patient with that, but hopefully that will go quickly as well. "It is looking like that, about the middle of January, I will be able to start training in the goal. So I will just try to enjoy the time with my family, enjoy the time with the lads at the training ground and now I have plenty of time to work." Cech added: "It has been a great week the last week because I could start working, I could even start to play tennis. I can be at the training ground and see the people I like to see, and that is better for my confidence and better for my feelings. "I hope this way I can make it back earlier than expected. Of course I am tired when I do the training session because my body is still a little bit tired. "But this has improved massively because I can work twice a day and at the end of the day, I am

tired but I am tired because of the work, not just because of the walking. So it has been great to discover this." Cech suffered the injury as he and Hunt raced for a ball in the first minute of Chelsea's match at Reading, the Irish midfielder's knee connecting with the goalkeeper's skull as he tried to gather the ball on the turf. The Czech star underwent surgery later that day which involved the insertion of two metal plates in his skull. He subsequently revealed that he could not remember anything about the collision. Cech has been badly missed by Chelsea, who have to rely particularly on third-choice goalkeeper Hilario in recent matches because of an injury to Carlo Cudicini. Hilario was widely judged to have been at fault on Arsenal's goal in their 1-1 draw with the champions on Sunday -- a result which left Manchester United with an eight-point advantage at the top of the table.



Barcelona players (L-R) Xavi, Ronaldinho, and Puyol stand together at a press conference in Yokohama, Japan on Tuesday. They flew into Japan on Monday to play in the Club World Cup.

## Berlusconi backs Carlo

INTERNET, undated

Milan president Silvio Berlusconi has given a vote of confidence to Carlo Ancelotti. Ancelotti has come under fire after a disappointing recent run of form in Serie A. Milan have won just one of their last seven Serie A games raising speculation over Ancelotti's future. However, Berlusconi insists he still has faith in Ancelotti to turn things round. "Carlo has my complete faith and that of the club officials," said Berlusconi. "We have a big group, but we can count only on half of them and it's evident at this moment there are problems." Despite the club's crippling injury list Berlusconi has admitted Milan are unlikely to enter the transfer market in January. "The group remains big and with value and I don't think we will enter the market," added Berlusconi.

## Lyon rule out Ribery swoop

INTERNET, undated

Lyon have issued a double transfer denial, saying they have no intention of signing either Franck Ribery or Milan Baros in January. Club president Jean-Michel Aulas said he had been given a list of targets for the winter transfer market, but French international winger Ribery was not among them. "I have agreed to sign a player because the coach has requested it," said Aulas. "He gave me a list of names, but the player has to be available. "As far as Franck Ribery is concerned, this avenue is no longer open." Houllier has also confirmed he has no interest in out-of-sorts Aston Villa striker Baros. Despite taking the Czech international to Liverpool earlier in his career, he said he did not want to add him to a slightly thin Lyon attacking line. "Milan Baros will not come. I won't say no twice," he said. "Concerning signings, I was clear. I said that with the same set-up, we could be in danger."

## Romanov fined over ref jibe

AFP, Glasgow

Hearts majority shareholder Vladimir Romanov has been fined 10,000 pounds (20,000 dollars) by the Scottish Football Association (FA) on Monday for comments on the club's website. Romanov was fined for breaches of the Scottish FA articles of association after he referred to the conduct of match officials during Hearts' successful Scottish Cup run last season. Romanov claimed: "Last season, you didn't manage to protect the Scottish Cup and gave it to Hearts, despite all the referees' efforts and intrigues." Heart tests for booters

REUTERS, Copenhagen

Players competing in UEFA's club tournaments from 2008 will have to undergo mandatory screening for heart disease, the Danish daily newspaper Politiken reported on Monday. Citing UEFA sources, Politiken said clubs taking part in the Champions League or the UEFA Cup would have to document that their players aged over 21 had undergone testing for cardiovascular disease.

# Sponsorship ruling takes toll on FIFA



REUTERS, Berne

FIFA has dismissed marketing director Jerome Valcke and three other employees following last week's New York court ruling against world soccer's governing body in a sponsorship case. In a statement on Tuesday, FIFA acknowledged its World Cup sponsorship negotiations with rival credit card firms Visa and MasterCard had "breached (FIFA's) business principles", adding that "FIFA cannot possibly accept such conduct among its own employees". FIFA said in the context of the contract talks, the four had been accused of "repeated dishonesty during negotiations and of giving false information to the FIFA deciding bodies in question." The statement added FIFA were "considering lodging an appeal against the court's judgment, while

taking account of the interests of every party involved and seeking suitable solutions." A U.S. District Judge overturned FIFA's planned eight-year sponsorship deal with Visa last week following a federal lawsuit brought by MasterCard. As previous sponsors of the World Cup finals, MasterCard successfully demonstrated they had a right of first refusal on any future arrangements. In her ruling, judge Loretta Preska said the FIFA negotiators had "lied repeatedly to MasterCard", including when they assured the company that FIFA "would not sign a deal for the post-2006 sponsorship rights with anyone else unless it could not reach agreement with MasterCard." Visa announced in April it had signed an eight-year deal with FIFA, which sources said was worth up to 200 million pounds (392.3 million dollars).

# Change the record, says Mancini

INTERNET, undated



Inter Coach Roberto Mancini has insisted that he is only happy to break records if it yields trophies at the end of the season. The Nerazzurri earned their eighth straight Serie A win against Empoli, equalling a record which had been previously achieved by Giovanni Trapattoni and Helenio Herrera. "Compliments are always appreciated. Yesterday we earned an important victory in a difficult game," said Mancini to Inter Channel on Monday. "However, records are only remembered when you win at the end. Herrera and Trapattoni ran away with the title when they set the records. "The boys are doing well. It's not always easy to change tactics during the game, but I have players who have no problems changing role and this makes it easier for me. "At Inter we started a job

together, we have known one another for many years now and things come automatically. This is certainly an advantage. "I saw the Roman derby and there was nothing that surprised me. I have experienced many derbies, in Rome and elsewhere, and I can say that they are always special matches. "Lazio deserved to win, they were very careful in the first half and played very well after the break," stated Mancini. The tactician has yet to renew his contract with the San Siro outfit which expires in 2007, but he has once again refused to comment on the issue. "There has been too much talking about this. The only important thing is for Inter to do well until the end," said the former striker to the radio program La Politica Nel Pallone. "There are still more than six months until the end. I am not a person who says something and thinks something different. "All my thoughts go to my work -- we can wait four more months to take this decision," concluded Mancini.

## Scholl makes quit plans

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich midfielder Mehmet Scholl has announced his decision to hang up his boots at the end of the season. The 36-year-old former Germany international has decided to retire in June, Bayern general manager Uli Hoeness revealed on Tuesday. "Mehmet will stop playing at the end of the season and Bayern will lose a player who has brought us a lot over the years," Hoeness told Bild. Scholl's final appearance for the German champions will be a friendly against Barcelona at the Allianz Arena in August and he is then likely to become involved in Bayern's youth team programme. Scholl, who is Bayern's longest serving player, joined the club from Karlsruhe in 1992. He has made a total of 384 Bundesliga appearances despite seeing his career plagued by several long-term injuries.

## Nantes admit Barthez interest

INTERNET, undated

Nantes have confirmed an interest in talking to veteran goalkeeper Fabien Barthez. The former France international retired from football in October after failing to secure a new club following his exit from Marseille. But reports have claimed Nantes are hoping to persuade Barthez to end his retirement and return to action in the New Year. Vladimir Stojkovic has failed to impress in goal this season and chairman Rudi Roussillon is ready to sanction the signing of a replacement. Barthez's name has been put forward and Nantes coach Georges Eo admits talks with the ex-Manchester United keeper are on the agenda. "This possible transfer has been talked about me, the chairman told me," Eo told radio station RTL. "He said we will talk with Fabien and he asked me my opinion. "The career of the boy is so prestigious, but we have three keepers and we will try to find the best solution possible."

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