

Bayern budging over Hargreaves

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich are finally ready to "listen to offers" for Owen Hargreaves after the midfielder again stated his desire to join Manchester United.

The England star is keen to try his luck in the Premiership - with Old Trafford his preferred destination - and has long campaigned for a move from the Bundesliga giants.

Bayern have previously insisted the player is not for sale, but now it appears they have finally cracked after general manager Uli Hoeneß told *The Sun* he will now listen to offers.

He said: "If ever we thought we had found a replacement for Owen, who cost less than we'd get for him, we might be prepared to think about it."

However, it is unlikely the player will be allowed to leave before the summer with Hoeneß admitting that Hargreaves - currently sidelined by a broken leg - is vital to their hopes this season.

"We face Real Madrid in the Champions League so we're not about to weaken our team," Hoeneß said.

"We're not a bank, we're a football club. Our top priority is to strengthen the team so what use to me is another £30million in the bank?"

"We want to do well in Europe and the Bundesliga and we need Hargreaves for that."

Lyon seek to bolster squad

REUTERS, Paris

Olympique Lyon chairman Jean-Michel Aulas is backing coach Gerard Houllier's bid to sign a striker in the January transfer window.

Lyon are firmly on course for a sixth successive Ligue 1 title having opened up a huge 17-point lead after demolishing second-placed Racing Lens 4-0 at the weekend.

But injuries to Brazilian prodigies Fred, French teenager Karim Benzema and Norwegian John Carew have left Lyon short of fire-power.

"I always listen to what the coach says and if Gerard Houllier says he needs another striker, even if the results are pretty good at the moment, we are going to hire another striker," Aulas said in a statement on the club's Web site.

Kalle swipes at Ballack

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich supremo Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has taken a swipe at Chelsea midfielder Michael Ballack.

Ballack rarely saw eye-to-eye with Bayern management as he balked at signing a new deal last season before eventually joining Chelsea on a Bosman.

Asked about the departure of the Germany international, Rummenigge said today: "We haven't missed him."

"He did score important goals for us, but he never did anything extraordinary."

Squad depth worries Jose

Football

AFP, London

Jose Mourinho fears he may have made a rare misjudgement that threatens to undermine Chelsea's attempt to win all four major trophies.

Mourinho prides himself on his attention to detail and his meticulous planning has laid the foundations for Chelsea to land back-to-back Premiership titles.

But the Portuguese coach is worried that his decision to choose quality over quantity has left his defence short of experienced back-up as they enter the busiest part of the season.

Mourinho allowed William Gallas and Robert Huth to leave Stamford Bridge in pre-season because he felt the addition of versatile Dutch defender Khalid Boulahrouz would provide sufficient cover for his back-four.

However, Boulahrouz has endured a torrid time as he adapts to life in the Premiership and Paulo Ferreira and Jeremi have fared little better, forcing Mourinho to use Ghana midfielder Michael Essien as a makeshift defender several times.

That would be less of a problem if England captain Terry wasn't struggling with a persistent back problem that sidelined him for Sunday's win at Everton and could keep him out again when Chelsea face Newcastle in the League Cup quarter-final at St James' Park on Wednesday.

With Chelsea competing for the Premiership as well as the Champions League and FA and League Cups, Mourinho knows he cannot afford to be caught short if injuries and suspension take their toll.

A move for a defender looks certain when the transfer window opens in January and he said: "It



JOSE MOURINHO

was a bit risky to face the season with only three central defenders because in the past we always had Carvalho, Terry, William Gallas and Robert Huth.

"Because Terry has not been injured for the past two seasons, we felt the fourth central defender was not playing a lot."

"But this season, John is having a few problems. He was suspended for a couple of games, then he was injured when we played Fulham and again yesterday. It means we are short of a player."

Newcastle manager Glenn Roeder is counting on Noberto Solano recovering from a groin strain in time to face Chelsea as an injury crisis has left him with just two fit senior defenders.

Former Chelsea left-back Celestine Babayaro is suspended and Craig Moore, Steve Carr, Titus Bramble and Olivier Bernard are all injured.

Teenager Paul Huntington, who made his first Premiership start in last week's 1-0 league defeat at Chelsea, is likely to play out of position at left-back, with Steven Taylor and Peter Ramage filling the centre-half roles.

"We knocked them out in the FA Cup one year and beat them on the last game of last season, so we will go into the game full of confidence and if we get a result we can be just one game away from Cardiff."

The same applies to Emre. He has a very sore ankle but says he has a good chance of playing against Chelsea."

Chelsea have lost four of their last five visits to St James' Park and are without a win there in five years.

Newcastle midfielder Kieron Dyer believes his side can extend that impressive record on Wednesday and he told Sky Sports: "Chelsea showed why they are champions at the weekend, they were magnificent. But we have got a decent record against them at home."

"Now we can put the Champions League into the cupboard until February and focus on the Premiership," Wenger said.

And Manchester United defender Gary Neville said they were in a good position before the competition restarted again in February.

"We are in a position where we can challenge and we have seen in the past what can happen if you are in good form in February, March and April," Neville said.

"We can beat anybody on our day because we are a great team."

Meanwhile United winger Cristiano Ronaldo took the opportunity to reaffirm his belief in the club's ability: "We are winning games. But in football you never know what is going to happen next but I think come next spring we will be up there competing for the title."

The signs are that 2007 could be the year when British football finally starts to resume control in the start.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who this year celebrated 10 years working with the Gunners, joined his old foe, Ferguson, in applauding the influence of the Premiership on European competition.

Under Martin O'Neill, Celtic came close to winning a title for Scotland in the 2003 UEFA Cup final but lost 3-2 to a Jose Mourinho-inspired Porto in extra-time.

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"It wasn't easy to pick ourselves up after the derby defeat but we did and that is what counts. My team proved it has a soul."

Opponents Torino will brace

themselves for a difficult encounter against one of the most potent sides in Italy.

Roma have the best strikeforce in the top flight, with 36 goals netted in 16 games, while Torino have only managed to score just 12 times this campaign.

To make matters worse for coach Alberto Zaccheroni, Torino will have to do without suspended defensive duo Marco Di Loreto and Gabriele Cioffi.

They go into the game on the back of last weekend's 2-0 triumph at Ascoli, which allowed them to

climb up to eighth place in the league standings.

Zaccheroni's men have taken 13 points out of a possible 15 in their last five games and are unbeaten since November 12.

"Now we are more of a team than we were at the beginning of the season," admitted Zaccheroni.

"This allows us to take positive results."

Roma will be without in-form defender Christian Panucci, who serves a one-match ban, while midfielder Simone Perrotta is sidelined through injury.

Everton file Mourinho complaint

AFP, London

Everton have decided to file a formal complaint to the Football Association over what they regard as a defamatory attack on striker Andy Johnson by Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho.

The Merseyside club have already indicated that they are considering legal action over Mourinho's criticism of Johnson's alleged diving, which he made after Chelsea's 3-2 win at Goodison Park on Sunday.

Mourinho was enraged by an incident in which Johnson jumped over Chelsea goalkeeper Hilario as they both went for the ball and tumbled after landing.

"He's dangerous for the opponents because you cannot trust him," Mourinho said of Johnson.

That infuriated Everton manager David Moyes, who argued that his forward had been taking evasive action to ensure he did not clatter into the goalkeeper.

Everton had called on Mourinho to retract his remarks but the lack of a response from Stamford Bridge prompted them to make things official with spokesman Ian Ross confirming: "We will now make a formal complaint to the FA over Jose Mourinho's remarks regarding Andrew Johnson."

Everton's move means the FA will have to review Mourinho's post-match interviews and decide whether he has a disciplinary case to answer.

Asian Cup seeds confirmed

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Heavyweights Australia, Iran, Japan and South Korea have been seeded for the Asian Cup finals next year, meaning they will avoid each other in the draw here later Tuesday.

The seedings are based on the FIFA world rankings for October 2006.

As such, they will be placed in the same pot for the draw and will not meet each other until the knockout stages of the showpiece tournament which runs from July 7-29.

The four co-hosts, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia, are also in their own pot, and will also be separated in the draw.

The remaining eight finalists – Bahrain, China, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan – were split into two other pots.

The 16 teams will be drawn into four pools of four teams with one team from each pot randomly selected for each pool.

The top two teams will progress to the knockout stages after the round robin.

At previous tournaments, teams were seeded solely on the basis of their performance in past Asian Cup finals.

"The new classification system ensures that the same number of strong teams are placed with each of the four co-hosts and is thus a break from the past," said the Asian Football Confederation.

"Another rationale behind basing the seedings on the FIFA world ranking is to avoid clubbing three or more FIFA World Cup 2006 teams (Japan, South Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Australia) in the same group."

The pots

- Pot 1: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam
- Pot 2: China, Iraq, UAE, Bahrain
- Pot 3: Qatar, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Oman
- Pot 4: Australia, Iran, Japan, South Korea

Sanchez leaves Guadalajara

REUTERS, Mexico City

Mexico goalkeeper Oswaldo Sanchez is leaving Guadalajara after seven years at the club and will join Santos Laguna.

Sanchez, regarded as one of the best goalkeepers Mexico has produced, announced his departure one week after the Chivas won the Mexican championship for the first time in nine years.

Guadalajara are Mexico's most popular club and the only one not to field foreign players. The club formed the backbone of the Mexican team at this year's World Cup, where Sanchez, playing shortly after the death of his father, was ever-present.

"That's life, it has its moments and cycles and I think my cycle (at Guadalajara) has finished," Sanchez told reporters.

Santos Laguna, based in the northern city of Torreon, finished with the worst record of the 18 teams in the Apertura championship, winning only one out of 17 games in Group Three.

The club are investing heavily in the team for the Clausura championship in the second half of the season. "Santos have offered me a very attractive package," said Sanchez.

Nancy face tough task

Football

AFP, Paris

Sunday.

The 2004 winners Sochaux, under the command of Guy Lacombe, will have to watch out for Le Mans in another Wednesday last eight clash. Le Mans, more known for the famous 24-hour motor race, have had a surprisingly good start to the season and their striker Ismael Bangoura is the first division joint top scorer with eight goals.

Lyon are the hot favourites in the competition and, should they get past Nancy, they will have a semi-final home draw against Sochaux or Le Mans.

Lyon

are

the gap between Lyon and the rest in France appears as wide as ever and further evidence of the dominance of Gerard Houllier's men was shown in their 4-0 demolition of second-placed Lens on Sunday.

Reims are the sole representatives from the second division still

in the competition but statistics are not on their side as the last time they won at Brittany club Rennes was 1960.

However Reims should not be underestimated following their penalty shootout victory over first division Monaco in the previous round.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, Bordeau host fellow first division side St Etienne, who have lost just one of their last seven league matches.

FIXTURES

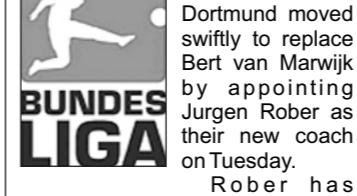
Quarterfinals

Wednesday

Sochaux v Le Mans, Rennes v Reims, Lyon v Nancy

Dortmund appoint Rober

INTERNET, undated



Borussia Dortmund moved swiftly to replace Bert van Marwijk by appointing Juergen Rober as their new coach on Tuesday.

Rober has signed a contract until the end of the season when it is thought Dortmund will pursue their interest

The 52-year-old led Partizan to second spot in the Serbian league, behind city rivals Red Star.

That achievement was not enough to keep him in a job, though.

He now returns to the Bundesliga, where he last coached Wolfsburg for just over a year before being dismissed in April 2004 with the club fighting relegation.

Previously, he led Hertha from the second division into the Champions League in a six-year spell between 1996 and 2002.

He will not find it quite so easy at Dortmund, however.

The club are in ninth place in the Bundesliga but fighting against supporter expectation which counted against Van Marwijk.

The Dutchman was booted by sections of the home support during the weekend defeat to Bayer Leverkusen but Rober believes the 80,000 that regularly pack the stadium can be an advantage rather than a hindrance.

He said: "Dortmund have always been very strong at home and, with the support of the fans, we have to get that back."

Sleepy Adriano

INTERNET, undated

Adriano is again in hot water at Inter Milan.

Gazzetta dello Sport says the Brazilian missed yesterday's training session after sleeping through his alarm.

It's reported Adriano was up late at a local nightclub and slept in, missing the recovery session after Sunday's victory over Messina.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini was not amused and witnesses say he was visibly upset over Adriano's absence.

Totti on hot streak