

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 prodigy Fred, French teenager Karim Benzema and Norwegian John Carew have left Lyon short of firepower.

"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 German international, Rummenigge said today: "We haven't missed him."

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

Totti on hot streak

Football

INTERNET, undated

Roma captain Francesco Totti will be looking to add to his impressive goalscoring tally when his team entertain Torino on Wednesday.

Totti is currently the top scorer in Italy's top flight with 11 goals after one of his most productive seasons yet.

The Italy playmaker has rediscovered his top form having suffered a serious foot injury earlier this year.

Totti's goals have proved key for the Eternal City giants to remain in second position in the standings behind Serie A leaders Internazionale.

Totti scored in last weekend's 4-0 hammering of third-placed Palermo that allowed Roma to bounce back from their unexpected 3-0 derby defeat to Lazio.

The result saw Roma extend their lead over Palermo to four points.

"We have proved the quality of this side," said Totti. "We are capable of bouncing back in style and that will gives us a lot of confidence in our campaign."

With Inter showing no signs of weakness and currently holding a seven-point lead over Roma, the Giallorossi know they will have to be patient and hope they take advantage when the Nerazzurri finally slip up.

Roberto Mancini's pacesetters travel to the Stadio Olimpico on

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 chose quality over quantity has left his defence short of experienced backup 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 Geremi 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 Nolberto 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.

Brits look forward to flagship year

Football

AFP, Paris

The year of 2007 looks set to be a fine vintage for British clubs after an unprecedented five qualified for next February's last 16 of the Champions League.

Manchester United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Chelsea and Celtic qualified for the knockout stages and United boss Alex Ferguson said one of Britain's representatives could go on to be champions of Europe.

"It is fantastic for British football," said Ferguson. "I think one of the British teams can win."

And on his own team, Ferguson added: "I think they are confident of their ability now. They know they can win games by playing some fantastic stuff."

Though the halcyon days of the 70s and 80s - when Liverpool, Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa claimed seven European Cups, and Tottenham, Ipswich and Liverpool won five UEFA Cups - are yet to be reached, England has taken its place at the forefront of the

European game since the ending of the seven-year Heysel ban.

Thirty-nine people died in a crush that followed a charge by Liverpool fans towards Juventus supporters at the 1985 European Cup final which the Merseysiders eventually lost 1-0 in Brussels' Heysel stadium.

English clubs were banned for 10 years but the suspension was reduced to seven.

Since their return in the early 90s, English clubs have won just three titles, two by Liverpool in the 2001 UEFA Cup and 2005 European Cup, and Manchester United in the 1999 European Cup.

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.

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

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, who this year celebrated 10 years working with the Gunners, and Tottenham, Ipswich and Liverpool won five UEFA Cups - are yet to be reached, England has taken its place at the forefront of the Premiership on European competi-

tion.

"That shows how much the Premiership has improved," Wenger said, referring to the five teams getting through.

Arsenal lost in last year's final to Barcelona and would love to go one better this time.

"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."



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil club Internacional captain Fernandao holds up the World Club Cup trophy from the cockpit of a plane on their arrival at the Porto Alegre airport in Brazil on Tuesday.

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 clutter 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

Defending French League Cup champions Nancy will have a tough task staying in the competition on Wednesday when they face imperious league leaders Lyon in the quarter-finals.

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.

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.

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.

Rennes continue their march in another Wednesday quarter-final with a home trip to Reims following their victory over Lille, who qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League next February, in a previous round.

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, Bordeaux 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 Jurgen 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

in current Arminia Bielefeld boss Thomas von Heesen.

However, should Rober, a former coach of Stuttgart, Hertha Berlin and Wolfsburg, impress then he may get an extended stay at the Westfalenstadion.

After former Dortmund boss Ottmar Hitzfeld turned down the chance to return to the club on Monday, attention turned to Rober, who has been out of work since being sacked by Partizan Belgrade in May.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Juergen Rober smiles during a news conference smiles after his appointment as head coach of the Bundesliga side Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday in Dortmund.

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.

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