



Lyon forward Sidney Govou (R) shoots past Nancy defender Sebastien Puygrenier to score in their League Cup match at the Gerland Stadium in Lyon on Wednesday.

Newcastle confirm Polygon approach

AFP, Newcastle

English Premiership side Newcastle confirmed Wednesday that St James' Park Group Limited -- a consortium backed by Polygon -- are one of the parties to approach them regarding a possible offer for the club.

The news comes after Magpies chairman Freddy Shepherd challenged the Jersey-based Belgravia Group and US hedge fund Polygon, who have been repeatedly linked with moves for the club, to make their moves public.

"The board wish to reiterate that they have not accepted any proposals for the company from any party, nor is any due diligence being conducted on the company," a statement from Newcastle United PLC said.

"Therefore there can be no certainty that an offer will be made, nor as to the terms on which any offer would be made."

Shepherd used Tuesday's brief annual general meeting in London to confirm talks with Belgravia are ongoing and reveal that Polygon, who were last week reported to have launched a successful takeover in conjunction with the United Bank of Switzerland, have requested access to the company's books.

FRENCH LEAGUE CUP

Lyon see off Nancy

Football

REUTERS, Paris

Florent Malouda scored one goal and set up another to send Olympique Lyon into the French League Cup semifinals with a 3-1 home victory over holders AS Nancy on Wednesday.

Ligue 1 leaders Lyon, who will play Le Mans for a spot in the final, went ahead when France winger Malouda beat Gennaro Bracigliano from close range on 53 minutes after being perfectly set up by

midfielder Hatem Ben Arfa.

Nancy, however, levelled the tie 12 minutes later when forward Moncef Zerka converted a cross from the left.

The five-times French champions eventually had the last word with goals from Sidney Govou and Alou Diarra in the last 10 minutes.

Earlier on Wednesday, Stade Reims knocked out Stade Rennes courtesy of a 51st-minute goal by striker Cedric Faure.

Twice European Cup finalists Reims, who now play in Ligue 2, will host Girondins Bordeaux in the semi-final.

Bordeaux went through when they beat St Etienne 1-0 after extra time on Tuesday.

Earlier on Wednesday, Le Mans scored two goals in two minutes in the second half to stun Sochaux 2-1 away and set up their meeting with Lyon.

Striker Mamadou Samassa headed home from close range to put the visitors in front after 49 minutes and Brazilian midfielder Grafite found the net from 18 metres in the 51st.

The hosts pulled a goal back through midfielder Mickael Isabey, who bent the ball into the net 15 minutes from time.

Mido relishes Blues showdown

Football

AFP, London

Egyptian striker Mido insists Tottenham would not fear a League Cup final showdown with English champions Chelsea.

Mido helped Tottenham book their place in the semifinals as he set up Jermain Defoe's extra-time winner against Southend on Wednesday.

Chelsea joined their London rivals in the last four with a win at Newcastle and Jose Mourinho's side are favourites to win the trophy.

But Tottenham are one of just two teams to have beaten Chelsea in the Premiership this season and

Mido is confident Martin Jol's men could repeat their 2-1 November success if they meet again in the final.

That victory was Tottenham's first over Chelsea in the league since 1990 but Mido told the London Evening Standard: "I want Chelsea in the final. They are a great team with a lot of quality, but we have beaten them this season and we are not scared of anyone."

"We were very disappointed last year with the results in the cup competitions at Grimsby and Leicester. Now we are in the semi-final and we are waiting eagerly for the draw. Hopefully we will go through and win this cup."

Tottenham were made to work hard before finally seeing off

Championship strugglers Southend 1-0 at White Hart Lane when Defoe converted Mido's cross with just five minutes remaining in extra-time.

Mido admitted he was already thinking about a potential penalty shoot-out and he said: "It was tough work against Southend. All the credit has to go to them. To come to our ground and play against Spurs like that shows they have a lot of character. "I was relieved when the goal went in because I was thinking I might have to take a penalty soon."

"Thank God we haven't lost the game because in the cup you never know what will happen. A lot of big teams have been beaten by smaller teams."

Dutch hooligans jailed

AFP, Nancy

Three supporters of Dutch club Feyenoord received prison sentences ranging from two weeks to a month here on Wednesday for their part in crowd trouble during last month's UEFA Cup tie against French club Nancy.

Two of the hooligans, aged 28 and 31 years, were sentenced to 15 days in jail and a third, aged 22 years, was sentenced to a month for violent behaviour, notably throwing bottles at police, before the match.

Two of the defendants were ordered to pay 150 euros (197 dollars) in damages plus interest to the police officers.

Up to 600 Dutch fans ransacked parts of the eastern French city before the November 30 game, and the match which Nancy won 3-0 to book their place in the last 32 of UEFA's second tier club competition, was temporarily halted when visiting supporters ran riot in the stands, raining down

Ancelotti eyes fourth spot

INTERNET, undated

Coach Carlo Ancelotti was pleased after Milan's win over Catania on Wednesday, although he is aware that there is still much to be improved.

The Rossoneri returned to winning ways thanks to brace by Kaka and Alberto Gilardino's third goal in two matches and now eye the fourth spot in the table, only six points away.

"After a good week's work we are improving. Catania are an attacking team but we managed to control everything pretty well," explained Ancelotti after the match at the San Siro.

"We did have a few problems, but we are slowly doing better, even if we still have to improve. In this period we have suffered and it was important to cut the distance from the fourth place.

"We are closing in on the good places with patience," added the Rossonero, who was impressed by Kaka's performance.

"He isn't completely fit because he still has a problem with his foot, but he played well. He is an extraordinary player and determined the outcome of the game.

"I am also glad that Gennaro Gattuso was back, that's important because he plays with heart and spirit and his determination is contagious, but I must say that all of my players did well tonight."

Vice-President Adriano Galliani was also satisfied after the win and confirmed that there is no chance that Milan will let Kaka leave the San Siro.

"I would cut off my hand before allowing Kaka to leave Milan," said the chief executive, answering to the reiterated rumours suggesting the Brazilian might join Real Madrid at the end of the season.

"Kaka doesn't need to answer any questions about his future, I will do so. Ricky signed a five-year contract with Milan and he is not leaving for any reason.

"In any case, he is happy to be a Rossonero and we will continue to build our team around him. I believe the fans can live a serene Christmas as to this issue," added the former Lega Calcio chief.

Sagnol wants Kaka at Bayern

AFP, Munich

French international defender Willy Sagnol has urged Bayern Munich to get the cheque book out in the winter break and sign AC Milan's Brazilian international playmaker Kaka.

"Having a player like Kaka -- who I know wants to leave AC Milan -- at Bayern would be a dream," Sagnol said in an interview with the Munchner AZ. "Of course he would not be cheap but it would be a great idea for us to sign a playmaker in the winter break."

AC Milan are in the bottom half of the Serie A table but would be reluctant to part with midfield maestro Kaka particularly after losing Ukraine international Andrei Shevchenko to Chelsea in the summer.

Bayern watched German international captain Michael Ballack join Chelsea on a free transfer in the summer themselves and have struggled without him, lying third in the league heading into the six-week winter hiatus.

The 29-year-old Sagnol, who signed from Monaco in 2000, plans to end his career at Bayern and dreams of repeating the 2001 Champions League win.

"I am here until 2010 and I hope to win the Champions League again," added Sagnol.

Bayern have reached the last 16 of this season's Champions League where they will face Real Madrid.

Doll to stay at Hamburg

AFP, Hamburg

Thomas Doll will stay on as SV Hamburg coach for the second half of the season, the club said in a press conference on Wednesday.

Hamburg lie second from bottom of the league table with just one win all season and have exited the German cup and Champions League.

The 40-year-old Doll, who guided the club to third last season, has been under pressure for months but Hamburg chiefs continue to back him to turn things around.

"I am very grateful for the board's faith in me," said Doll. "I am certain that I am the right man. Every player will be ready for the second half of the season so we can get the points we need (to avoid relegation)."

Hamburg are the only founding member in the German top-flight never to be relegated.

GERMAN CUP

Aachen jinx strikes Bayern

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's hopes of lifting the German Cup for a third successive season went up in smoke as Alemannia Aachen produced the shock of the season with a 4-2 win on Wednesday to eliminate the holders at the last 16 stage.

The damage was done in the first half with Aachen taking a three goal lead through Romanian midfielder Laurentiu Reghecampf and Marius Ebbers.

Bayern did make a spirited second-half comeback to reduce the margin to 3-2 but German international Jan Schlaudraff, who is a transfer target for Bayern during the winter transfer window, sealed it for the hosts late on.

Incredibly Bayern had not lost in the cup for close to three years with their last reverse coming at the hands of Aachen who won the quarterfinal match 2-1 back in February 2004.

"We lost the game in the first half when we missed our chances and then collapsed at the back," said Bayern coach Felix Magath.

"We thought we had the game under control and then we made mistakes. We conceded three goals but I would not go as far as saying we have defensive problems. It was just a freak thing that all their shots went in."

German Under-21 international Michael Rensing was deputising for Oliver Kahn in goal as Magath felt he would benefit from the experience but it was one to forget as Aachen scored

three times in the first half.

An unstoppable free-kick from Reghecampf put Aachen ahead in the 11th minute and he scored again on 39 minutes as Bayern defenders allowed him to drill in a low shot.

Counter attack caught Bayern out again close to half-time with Ebbers finishing a fine move.

"Bayern had the better chances early on and if they had gone ahead it would have been difficult, but everything we hit went in -- sometimes it goes like that," said Aachen manager Michael Frontzeck.

Lukas Podolski came on in the second half for Bayern and had an immediate impact scoring two minutes after the break.

Dutch midfielder Marc van Bommel then produced a terrific strike on 68 minutes to make it 3-2 as Aachen wobbled.

But Schlaudraff produced a mesmerising run in the final minute and capped it with a clever finish to put Aachen through.

"We were running on fumes at the end," admitted Schlaudraff. "We knew it would be tough to stop Bayern from showing their individual qualities and it certainly was. They had chances but the difference was we took ours."

With favourites Bayern out the cup looks wide open particularly as Werder Bremen and Schalke 04, joint leaders in the league, have also been knocked out.

There are seven Bundesliga teams left among the last eight with VfB Stuttgart, fourth in the league, installed as new favourites closely followed by Hertha Berlin.

Last season's finalists Eintracht Frankfurt, FC Nuremberg, VfL Wolfsburg and Hanover complete the list of top-flight sides.

Second division Kickers Offenbach are the only team left in the competition from outside the Bundesliga after their 2-1 win over Wacker Burghausen on Wednesday.

Ruud carries on Kuyt row

INTERNET, undated

Ruud van Nistelrooy has continued his row with Liverpool striker Dirk Kuyt in the Dutch media.

The Real Madrid marksman is upset that he has fallen out with Holland coach Marco van Basten and seen Liverpool star Kuyt profit in his absence.

Kuyt recently criticised the former Manchester United centre-forward for suggesting that Van Basten has his personal favourites within the squad, requesting that Van Nistelrooy should keep his opinions to himself.

"If this is his opinion and reasoning, he had to call me instead of speaking with the press and responding on television," the Real hit-man told Voetbal International.

"Some players are very geared to act in a way so it is only to their own advantage.

"They don't say what they mean but only what others want to hear."



PHOTO: AFP

A disconsolate Bayern Munich defender Willy Sagnol hides his face in his hands following their shock German Cup loss to SV Alemannia Aachen in Aachen on Wednesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**

1 Wanted-poster abbr.

4 Uraei

8 Roams.

12 Energy

13 Tasteless

14 Laugh-a-minute

15 Have bills

16 "Queen — Day"

17 Plankton component

18 Department store decorator

21 Apr. addressee

22 Spigot

23 Dieter's entree

26 Encountered

27 Weaken

30 Office shape

31 Clamptt patriarch

32 Movie

33 Plead

34 Archery-bow wood

35 Heart line?

36 Some people dispense with it
- 37 Intention

38 It may contain junk

45 Tittle

46 What Bialystock and Bloom hoped for

47 Shock partner

48 Month after Ab

49 Birthright barterer

50 Roulette bet

51 Svelte

52 Camera part

53 Expert

DOWN

1 Acknowledged

2 Fuzzy fruit

3 Congregation's call

4 Have the money for

5 Decelerates

6 Cohort, out West

7 Turned the ignition key

8 Clutch

9 Isn't well

10 Venetian magistrate

11 Headliner

19 Use an old phone

20 Take the cake?

23 Turn on the water-works

Solution time: 27 mins.
- 24 "Hail!"

25 Trail the pack

26 Kitten's comment

27 Round Table address

28 Pismire

29 Shooter's pellet

31 Husky

32 Robin Cook novel

34 "Absolutely"

35 Short-range passenger plane

36 Sacred song

37 Clio contender

38 Conks out

39 Toss the dice

40 Needle case

41 Kennedy matriarch

42 "Star Trek" speed factor

43 Water pitcher

44 Start over

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14		
15				16				17		
18			19				20			
			21			22				
23	24	25			26			27	28	29
30					31			32		
33				34			35			
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38	39	40			41			42	43	44
45					46			47		
48					49			50		
51					52			53		

CRYPTOQUIP

Q QNR PQSM CRJVJ XQVM

WGKHHQSP LKFS CZMMJ RSL

JHXQCCQSP FKKL NQPGC AM

MDHZMJJML RJRD RWCJ

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AS THE PROPRIETOR OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE, I GUESS I WOULD SAY YOU'RE ITS FRIGHTFUL OWNER.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals X

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.