



PHOTO: AFP

**HE WHO LAUGHS LAST:** Real Madrid midfielder David Beckham (R) shares a light moment with teammate Antonio Cassano during a training session in Madrid on Friday. Beckham has signed a five year deal with MLS team LA Galaxy where he is set to earn a staggering 248 million dollars over five years.

## Bayern in for Robben

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich are launching a shock bid for Chelsea midfielder Arjen Robben.

The Daily Star says Bayern supremo Karl-Heinz Rummenigge is ready to offer £15 million to land the tricky Dutch winger.

Only this week Rummenigge admitted they were in the market for a "high calibre" midfielder and the deal could pave the way for Owen Hargreaves to complete his dream move to Manchester United this month.

## Chelsea ignore Jose exit talk

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea were today making no official comment following reports that Jose Mourinho is to quit the club at the end of the season.

However, they were understood to be giving the stories 'no credence' after suggestions the Portuguese coach had told a friend he would be leaving in the summer.

Mourinho is alleged to have said he will quit in May but it is claimed no such conversation took place.

The Chelsea coach has led the club to two successive Premiership titles and they are currently six points adrift of Manchester United at the top of the league.

Mourinho is battling with a lengthy injury list and claims he cannot bring any new players into the club during the transfer window.

But suggestions he is unhappy at the way chief scout Frank Arnesen has taken on a more important role, including transfers, were also understood to be off the mark.

Mourinho did reveal his frustra

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

## Inter eye more records

AFP, Rome



Inter Milan will set a new record for consecutive Serie A victories if they register their 12th straight win at Torino on Saturday as Italy's top division resumes after its winter break.

In the last match before the three-week pause, the league leaders beat Atalanta to equal Roma's record of 11 straight wins that was set last season.

Winter breaks can disrupt a winning team's momentum, but Inter midfielder Dejan Stankovic is confident the time spent at a Bahrain training camp, followed by Tuesday's Italian Cup win at Empoli, has kept his side sharp.

"We went into the break and we were doing well, but from what I saw in Bahrain and at Empoli, we haven't lost much," said the dynamic 28-year-old Serb.

"The break certainly takes away a bit of physical strength and focus, but there's a lot up for grabs this year and if we have lost something, we

will have to get it back quickly.

"We know it will be a difficult game against Torino as they are a well organised team. They will cause us problems for 90 minutes.

"But if we play like we can, if we are focussed, determined and have that decisive aggression, we can win."

Inter, who finished third last season but were handed the Scudetto after Juventus and AC Milan were found guilty of match-fixing, will come face to face with their former coach Alberto Zaccheroni.

Zaccheroni, who spent a brief and unsuccessful spell at Inter during the 2003-04 season following the sacking of Hector Cuper, took charge of Torino just days before the current campaign began after two years out of football.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

### FIXTURES

(all 1400GMT kick-off unless stated):

**Saturday**  
Empoli v Parma (1700GMT), Torino v Inter Milan (1930GMT)

**Sunday**  
AC Milan v Reggina, Atalanta v Livorno, Cagliari v Ascoli, Chievo v Catania, Lazio v Siena (1930GMT), Messina v Roma, Palermo v Udinese, Sampdoria v Fiorentina

## MU mum on Chelsea woes

AFP, Manchester



United agree with that opinion.

The champions have struggled over recent weeks as the poor form of key players, injuries and suspensions have conspired against manager Jose Mourinho, whose own future at the club has been called into question by indications of a suspected rift between him and Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich.

For all their problems, however, Chelsea head into Saturday's home match against struggling Wigan only six points behind United, who will be confident of repeating last week's FA Cup win over Aston Villa

in their Premiership meeting at Old Trafford. And United captain Gary Neville and manager Sir Alex Ferguson have been unanimous this week in stressing that the title race is unlikely to be decided until much later in the season.

"Chelsea will come back at us," predicted Ferguson, who is expected to hand on-loan striker Henrik Larsson his Premiership

### FIXTURES

**Saturday**  
Blackburn v Arsenal, Bolton v Man City, Charlton v Middlesbrough, Chelsea v Wigan Athletic, Man Utd v Aston Villa, Sheff Utd v Portsmouth, Watford v Liverpool

**Sunday**  
West Ham v Fulham, Everton v Reading, Tottenham v Newcastle

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

## Press hails Beckham deal

AFP, London

British commentators Friday hailed David Beckham's US mega deal as a shrewd financial move for a footballer whose top playing days are behind him, but they teased him about his wider motives.

Many underlined that Beckham's wife, former "Posh" Spice Girl Victoria, will be in her element in the glitzy surroundings of star-studded Hollywood with its year-round California sun and endless shopping possibilities.

Jokes also abounded about the prospect of the celebrity Londoner heading for the land of blockbuster movies and hit music, after his multi-million dollar deal with the US soccer team, Los Angeles Galaxy.

"There are plenty of shops and television studios. Victoria might even bump into a record producer," said media guru Max Clifford.

"LA is the centre of the movie business so maybe there is a step towards that direction.... Maybe he wants to go into the movies -- if they are silent movies he has a good chance."

Beckham on Thursday confirmed the move, which will take the 31-year-old star from his current job at Real Madrid in July. He insisted he wasn't doing it for the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 7

## Ferguson understands Becks

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson revealed Friday that David Beckham's move to the United States had not surprised him because he knew the midfielder would not return to England if he could not come back to Manchester United.

The United manager, who sold Beckham to Real Madrid for 25 million pounds in 2003, said he believed Beckham has so much affection for United that he would not want to play against them for any other club in England.

"I anticipated that," said Ferguson on Friday when asked his response to Beckham's money-spinning move to Major League Soccer's Los Angeles Galaxy team. "I expected him to go to America. We wish him well. It's a big career change to go from playing for Real Madrid to playing in America."

"I don't think there was any chance of him coming back to England having played for us."

"I think deep down he was always a United fan and I don't think there was any chance of him coming back to another English club."

Ferguson believes former England captain Beckham's move

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## BECKHAM SIGNS FOR LA GALAXY

# From football to soccer



### Football

AFP, Madrid

David Beckham will begin a new and possibly final mission in his colourful football career by quitting Real Madrid for Los Angeles Galaxy in the United States in a deal reported to be worth a staggering 128 million pounds (248m dollars).

The former England captain will join the American side on a five-year contract starting in July, with endorsement deals a major factor.

Not since Pele stepped onto the field for the New York Cosmos in 1975 has American soccer seen anything approaching the scope of what a Beckham signing would mean.

In a statement the 31-year-old midfielder confirmed on Thursday: "Real Madrid asked me to make a decision regarding my future and the offer to extend my contract by a further two seasons."

"After discussing several options with my family and advisers to either stay here at Madrid or join other major British and European clubs, I have decided to join the Los Angeles Galaxy and play in the MLS from August this year."

"I am proud to have played for two of the biggest clubs in football and I look forward to the new challenge of growing the world's most popular game in a country that is as passionate about its sport as my own."

He added: "For the rest of this season I will continue to give 100 percent to my coach, team mates and fans as I believe (Real coach) Fabio Capello will bring this club

and its supporters the success they truly deserve."

Real Madrid confirmed their high profile star was leaving.

"After a meeting between both parties it was agreed David will not extend his current contract" which runs to June 30, the club said in a statement on its website.

The king's ransom for Beckham will rely upon money from endorsement deals as well as salary. Not bad for a man whose name was once considered so unknown among Americans that "Bend it like Beckham" nearly had another US title.

"A lot of that is going to be on the commercial side. That's not going to be because the Galaxy is paying him that much money," said Timothy Leiweke, president of the ownership group that operates the Galaxy.

"He has many endorsement opportunities here."

The move to LA Galaxy, which is based near Beckham's Southern California sports academy, comes at the end of a week when the player had been negotiating a new deal that would have kept him at the Bernabeu until 2009.

Speculation that his tenure in Madrid had come to an end was heightened Wednesday when Real sporting director Predrag Mijatovic was quoted as telling Sky Italia that his contract with the Spanish giants had not been renewed.

But the club later denied that the star midfielder was on his way out, stressing that negotiations over a new deal were still ongoing.

Under FIFA guidelines, Beckham has been able to openly negotiate with other clubs since January 1 because he is in the final

six months of his contract.

Beckham, who had previously spent the whole of his professional career with Manchester United, moved to Spain in 2003 after falling out with Old Trafford mentor Sir Alex Ferguson.

He was one of several high-profile signings, along with Zinedine Zidane, Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Luis Figo, who collectively became known as the "galaticos".

But Real have failed to win a major trophy during Beckham's time in Spain and he himself has drifted out of the first team.

While Beckham has fallen from the starting lineup, he will be a superstar with the glamour and appeal to make American audiences take notice of a sport largely ignored in favor of baseball, basketball and American football.

His off-field activities and high-profile will be a perfect fit for the Hollywood scene and provide opportunities for his wife, former Spice Girl Victoria Beckham.

It will also be a boon for his corporate sponsors, who reportedly pay Beckham 20 million dollars a year for his golden endorsement.

When Pele joined the Cosmos the Brazilian legend became the main man of a global all-star team that included Franz Beckenbauer and Giorgio Chinaglia.

But once Pele retired, the star faded and the Cosmos and the entire North American Soccer League folded soon after, a victim of over expansion and little interest in the game beyond the superstar squad.

That lesson has helped keep

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

# Posh Becks goes Hollywood



### Football

AFP, Los Angeles

Lights! Camera! Beckham: celebrity-obsessed Los Angeles was abuzz Thursday at the prospect of welcoming David Beckham and his pop-star wife into the Hollywood jet-set.

The former England captain and Manchester United star announced Thursday he would join the Los Angeles Galaxy this year, leaving Spanish giants Real Madrid in a deal reported to be worth 128 million pounds (248 million dollars).

News that the footballer and his wife Victoria 'Posh Spice' Beckham

are moving to Los Angeles left showbusiness media licking their lips in anticipation at the arrival of one of the world's most photographed couples.

"Becks and Posh To Move To US, Provide Us With More Material" enthused the popular Us Magazine on its website.

People Magazine also led with the story on its online edition, declaring: "It's official: Posh and Becks moving to LA."

In a further illustration of the Beckham brand's global reach, even movie industry trade daily Variety reported the news.

"Soccer star David Beckham, one of the world's most recognizable celebrities, is going

Hollywood," Variety said on its website.

Beckham and his wife have long been rumored to be planning a move to Los Angeles where the footballer opened an academy in 2005.

The couple recently struck up a friendship with Hollywood star Tom Cruise and wife Katie Holmes, while Brad Pitt was last year reported to have asked the footballer to give lessons to partner Angelina Jolie's son Maddox.

Beckham is one of the few foreign footballers to register in the consciousness of the American public.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

## AUSTRALIAN OPEN Tough draw for top seeds

AFP, Melbourne

There will be no repeat of last year's Australian Open final with top seed and defending champion Roger Federer and 2006 finalist Marcos Baghdatis drawn in the same quarter of the men's singles.

World No.1 Federer, bidding for his third Australian Open crown, also has American Andy Roddick and his 2005 semi-final conqueror Marat Safin in his half of the men's draw for next week's opening Grand Slam of the season.

Federer opens with a match against Germany's 83rd-ranked Bjorn Phau and is drawn to meet the No.11 ranked Cypriot Baghdatis in the quarter-finals.

Roddick, the 2003 US Open champion, and Safin can meet as early as the third round as the Russian goes into the year's first

SEE PAGE 18 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP

Swiss world number one Roger Federer slams a backhand return down the line during a practice session in the lead-up to the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday.

'POSH SPICE' VICTORIA & DAVID BECKHAM