

Wenger sceptic

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger believes that it will take 10 David Beckhams if soccer is ever to make a major breakthrough in the United States.

The former England skipper will leave Real Madrid in a mind-boggling 250 million-dollar deal to play for Los Angeles Galaxy in the MLS, but Wenger insists the sport in the States needs a huge influx of similar big names.

"If they want to really have a go in America it will be great for football and they must multiply these things up by six, seven, 10 times," said the Frenchman.

"If you have 10 players like Beckham in the league, that will create a lift. One is not enough.

"I hear there is a big playing base in America, around 16 million playing football - but for the elite there is no connection with the people who play in the colleges.

"They started first by creating an elite without having a base. Now they have a base and it will be the right moment to create an elite again - but just Beckham is not enough. They need to buy 10."

Wenger also believes that the move to the relative soccer backwater does not sound the death knell for the 31-year-old Beckham's career

"I do not believe he is dead as a football player. He has good stamina, he never had great pace and players with that last a long time," said the Gunners boss.

Zulu leader warns of WC flop

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's failure to combat crime and international perceptions that the country is unsafe, could render the 2010 Soccer World Cup a "monumental flop", veteran Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi said Friday.

The former cabinet minister said this international perception could deter some of the 450,000 visitors expected to visit the country - the first African country to host the massive international event.

"If prospective international visitors judge our country not safe enough to travel to, the event could turn out to be a monumental flop, and any economic gains hoped for will vanish into thin air," Buthelezi said in his weekly newsletter.

South Africa has one of highest crime rates in the world, with 18,793 murders reported in the country of 46 million over the 2004-05 financial year, according to national crime statistics.

More than 55,000 rape cases were reported by police in 2005.

Buthelezi regards this as disgraceful, adding the country's criminal justice system was on the verge of collapse.

"The government's inability to identify, combat, isolate and successfully prosecute and incarcerate criminals is a national disgrace," he said.

He also condemned the culture of glamorising crime in South Africa's townships as well as unhealthy, unfit and semi-literate police officers who were untrained and should be removed from the country's police services.

"It is totally unacceptable that tens of thousands of rapists, murderers, pedophiles, vehicle hijackers, drug dealers and thieves of all kinds as well as national and international criminal syndicates strike every hour and everyday in South Africa - usually with impunity," he said.

Atouba in hot water

INTERNET, undated

Thimothee Atouba may have played his last game for Bundesliga strugglers Hamburg after being sent home from their winter training camp in Dubai.

The Cameroon international has been hampered by a pelvic injury in recent weeks, but was taken to the United Arab Emirates by coach Thomas Doll despite arguing he should have been allowed to stay in Germany for treatment.

And Atouba's persistent complaining has now led to him being sent back to Germany, according to Hamburg's director of sport Dietmar Beiersdorfer.

"We can do without any disturbances like he has been in the last few days," Beiersdorfer told the Welt newspaper.

"We have a very large group of carers who work hard and are available around the clock for the players to get them fit."

Atouba has already been at the centre of controversy this season after making a gesture towards the club's own fans following his substitution in the Champions League win over CSKA Moscow.

He later apologised for that, but this latest escapade may prove to be the last.

"I have told him to consider his future on his way back; his future at HSV is in his own hands," coach Doll added.

Emre row intensifies

AFP, London



Newcastle travel to Tottenham on Sunday with the future of midfielder Emre in doubt

after he was accused of aiming racial insults at black Everton players.

The Turkish international's preparations for Sunday's Premiership clash were interrupted by the announcement on Friday that he was to be charged with using racially-aggravated abusive and/or insulting words relating to an incident during the 3-0 defeat at Goodison Park at the end of December.

Only last week Newcastle manager Glenn Roeder claimed the matter would go no further despite complaints from Everton fans at Emre's behaviour during the stormy encounter which saw the 26-year-old involved in angry scenes with Everton's Tim Howard, Joseph Yobo and Joleon Lescott.

Roeder has backed devout Muslim Emre to the hilt, but will be left in an awkward position if the former Inter Milan star fails to clear his name, after recently insisting he will ship out any player found guilty of racist behaviour.

He said: "It's certainly something I won't tolerate. If I ever had any sort of feeling that any of the players were racist in any sort of way then they wouldn't stay at Newcastle. In any incidents where there is racial abuse we have to come down hard."

A Newcastle spokesman added: "We cannot comment further other than to say the player intends to deny the charge."

Emre, who has until January 29 to reply, hopes to return from a groin injury to assist Newcastle's bid to secure a first double of the season at a venue where they have not won for almost four years, since a 1-0 victory at the start of 2003, courtesy of a goal by current Tottenham midfielder Jermaine Jenas.

Jenas, who is ruled out by an ankle problem against his former club, has pinpointed a resurgent Kieron Dyer as the major threat to the hosts' bid to avoid back-to-back Premiership home defeats.

He said: "It's a massive boost for Newcastle to have him back and he gives them something extra up front, he has the ability to get behind defences which isn't there when he's not around.

"He's my friend so I'm delighted to see him back. He's had a tough time with injuries and it's great to see him doing well again."



BELOZOGLU EMRE

Robbie Keane and Aaron Lennon are likely to return to Tottenham's starting line-up after substitute appearances in last week's FA Cup draw at Cardiff City.

Defender Ledley King is back in training after a foot injury, full-back Benoit Assou-Ekotto has recovered from a groin problem, while Hossam Ghaly could play in a mask after losing four teeth following a kick in the mouth at Portsmouth.

Despite a mediocre first-half to the campaign, mid-table Newcastle haven't ruled out a top six spot, and midfielder Nicky Butt, who is a doubt with flu, said: "If we put a good run together we can realistically get up to the European places, at least.

"We could possibly nick the last Champions League place but that's wishing for an amazing run. We can definitely get into Europe, easily."

Roeder, who will hand midfielder Antoine Sibierski a 12-month contract extension when his current deal expires in the summer, has money available to strengthen his squad, and he added: "There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to bring players in.

"The chairman's indicated if we can get another club to sell a player we want then we can find a way of financing it. He's given me the

confidence he'll do everything to support me."

Roeder needs to strengthen at the back, and has been linked with West Ham defender Anton Ferdinand, and West Bromwich Albion's highly-rated centre-half Curtis Davies.

He added: "Anton Ferdinand is a name that has been thrown up, but I can't see Alan Curtishey would want to sell him. We think there are three or four young players in the Championship who would add to our squad. You could probably name them quite easily."

Newcastle captain Scott Parker returns from suspension.

Lauren on way out

AFP, London

Arsenal will allow experienced Cameroon full-back Lauren to leave if he finds a new club during the January transfer window, manager Arsene Wenger confirmed on Friday.

Lauren is fit again after a year out with a knee injury and Wenger admitted he was unlikely to be able to force his way back into the Gunners' first team.

"The problem is that since Lauren got injured I have Justin Hoyte who got promoted, I have Emmanuel Eboué who got promoted and I have Johan Djourou who can play in there too.

"It's always the same. You make room for young players and then it is difficult to leave them out again. I feel we have too many players in that position now."

West Ham have already expressed an interest in signing the 29-year-old.

Wenger, speaking to Arsenal's official website, added: "Lauren is free to talk to anyone because it is the end of his contract but frankly I don't know if he has spoken to West Ham. He doesn't have to inform me if he wants to speak to anyone."

Marcelinho signs for Wolfsburg

AFP, Wolfsburg

Brazilian midfielder Marcelinho returned to the Bundesliga on Friday, signing for VfL Wolfsburg after a brief six-month stay with Trabzonspor in Turkey.

The 31-year-old Brazilian has already spent five years in Germany, where he had a stormy stay with Hertha Berlin for whom he played 155 games, scoring 65 goals.

"It's a fabulous day for me," said Marcelinho at a press conference. "I really wanted to return to Germany."

German press reports claimed that Marcelinho would be paid 2.5 million euros a year as well as a signing-on-fee.

Wolfsburg general manager Klaus Fuchs said: "We went up to the limit financially to complete this transfer which marks a turning point in Wolfsburg's history."

Luisao sentenced for drink driving

AFP, Lisbon

A court in Portugal on Friday sentenced Benfica's Brazilian international defender Luisao to 40 hours of community service after he was caught driving under the influence of alcohol.

A blood-alcohol test performed on the 25-year-old after he was stopped by police in Lisbon in the early hours of Friday put his blood alcohol level at 1.44 grams per litre of blood, compared to the Portuguese legal limit of 0.5 grams per litre.

Luisao told reporters after he was sentenced that he had had a few drinks with his wife and a few friends at a restaurant before he was stopped by police in a routine road stop.

"In three and a half years at Benfica I have never caused any problems and I would like to be known for my sporting achievements and not for a situation that could have happened to anyone," he said.

Roma title bid strengthened

INTERNET, undated

Title-chasing Roma travel to Messina with two new recruits in their squad and looking to cut Internazionale's seven-point lead at the top of Serie A.

Former Empoli striker Francesco Tavano has joined the capital club as has Nantes midfielder Christian Wilhelmsson, while forward Vincenzo Montella has been sent on loan to Fulham.

Tavano joins a club that has scored more goals than any other in Serie A and which, in 12-goal Francesco Totti, has the front-runner in the race to be 'capocannoniere' (leading goalscorer) in Serie A.

Tavano has big ambitions on his return to Italy after a disappointing spell with Spanish outfit Valencia.

"I am delighted to be at Roma," he said. "It was a dream of mine to play alongside Totti and I can only be grateful for this opportunity.

"(Roma coach Luciano) Spalletti has asked me to give my best and I will try not to disappoint the fans, hoping that they will not miss Montella too much."

The Eternal City giants face a tough challenge going into 2007, with the Giallorossi having to play catch-up with runaway leaders Inter, who have looked unstoppable so far.

"We have to believe that it's possible," Tavano added.

"Seven points is a big margin, but we can beat them in the race for the Scudetto."

Smith keeps Gers guessing

AFP, Glasgow



Football

New Rangers boss Walter Smith declined to end the uncertainty over whether he would restore Barry Ferguson to the club captaincy as he prepared for his first game back in charge of the Ibrox giants.

Relieved that Rangers and the Scottish Football Association have agreed a 400,000-pound compensation deal over his departure from the national team, Smith now wants to focus on rebuilding Rangers, starting with Saturday's Premier League clash with Dundee United.

"I'm glad it's over with and I think it allows each of us to get on and do what we want to do," said Smith.

The first tough decision facing

Smith is the position of Ferguson, who was stripped of the captaincy by former boss Paul Le Guen, triggering a power struggle that resulted in the Frenchman leaving the club.

"I've spoken to a number of players about it but you'll have to wait until tomorrow to see who the captain is," Smith said.

Smith, who guided Rangers to seven SPL titles in his previous spell at the club during the 1990s, is still hopeful of signing Falkirk forward Alan Gow after having a 100,000-pound bid turned down.

Falkirk are holding out for a figure five times that amount, although Gow will be able to leave for nothing in the summer.

"The clubs are in discussion but nothing has been resolved at the moment," said Smith, who is also expected to bring Scotland defender David Weir back north from his old club Everton.

Smith added: "We would like to bring one or two players in the transfer window and we will endeavour to do so over the next couple of weeks.

"I don't want to go into individual aspects of that," he said.

Smith also made it clear that he would not be instigating an automatic clearout of players brought to the club by Le Guen.

"The players who are here, their only problem has been lack of consistency. You can't say they are not a good level of player and that's the problem.

"Over the last half a dozen games, there have been some very good performances and some very ordinary performances and we have to try to get to the bottom of that first and foremost.

"It takes someone who has come in a little time to have a look and try to put their finger on why that has been the case."

Beckham plastered on US news



Football

AFP, Washington

David Beckham's leap from Real Madrid to the Los Angeles Galaxy was front-page news across the United States on Friday, his 250 million-dollar deal sparking such headlines as "Spend it Like Beckham".

That was the slogan on the front of the tabloid New York Post, accompanied by a Vanity Fair photograph of a shirtless Beckham.

The English football star's five-year stint will begin once his contract at Real Madrid expires June 30, boosting the American profile of a sport largely ignored by US sports supporters in favour of basketball, baseball and American football.

"Beckham's Big Score" topped the New York Daily News tabloid front, noting his one million dollar a week payout atop a lead story on US President George W. Bush's plans to send more troops

into Iraq.

Beckham and his wife, former Spice Girl Victoria Beckham, will clearly be a big hit off the field with the Hollywood glamour crowd and the many celebrities already their friends.

"Beckham enters Hollywood orbit" heralded Daily Variety on its front page, affirming "Becks" star power with the entertainment world.

The Los Angeles Times' front page tale on the Beckhams was headlined "A Pair of Stars, an LA sky and a Happy Galaxy - The Beckhams, a soccer icon and a former Spice Girl, are leaving London for the lights of Hollywood".

The first sentence seemed to sum up the entire movie-esque scenario of Beckham becoming the messiah for football in America - "Somehow it was just meant to be".

The 31-year-old midfielder was side-by-side with the Iraq war on the front of The New York Times, the story noting the importing of US stars in all American sport

leagues under the headline "A Soccer Star Heads to US, Heeding Lure of Hollywood."

Much of Beckham's income will come not from his work on the field but from a portion of the souvenir, marketing and sponsorship boost he will bring to Major League Soccer, and especially his new club.

Not everyone jumped on the Beckham bandwagon, however.

USA Today had a short front-page mention of Beckham but put its story on his arrival on the 10th of 12 pages in its sports section.

Beckham had a picture at the bottom of the front page of the Washington Post and a major story on the front page of the sports section examining the cultural phenomenon of Beckham under the headline "MLS's Posh Pickup".

The Post dubbed Beckham the "Pied Piper" for the 13-team US league, having replaced US teen Freddy Adu as the face of MLS.

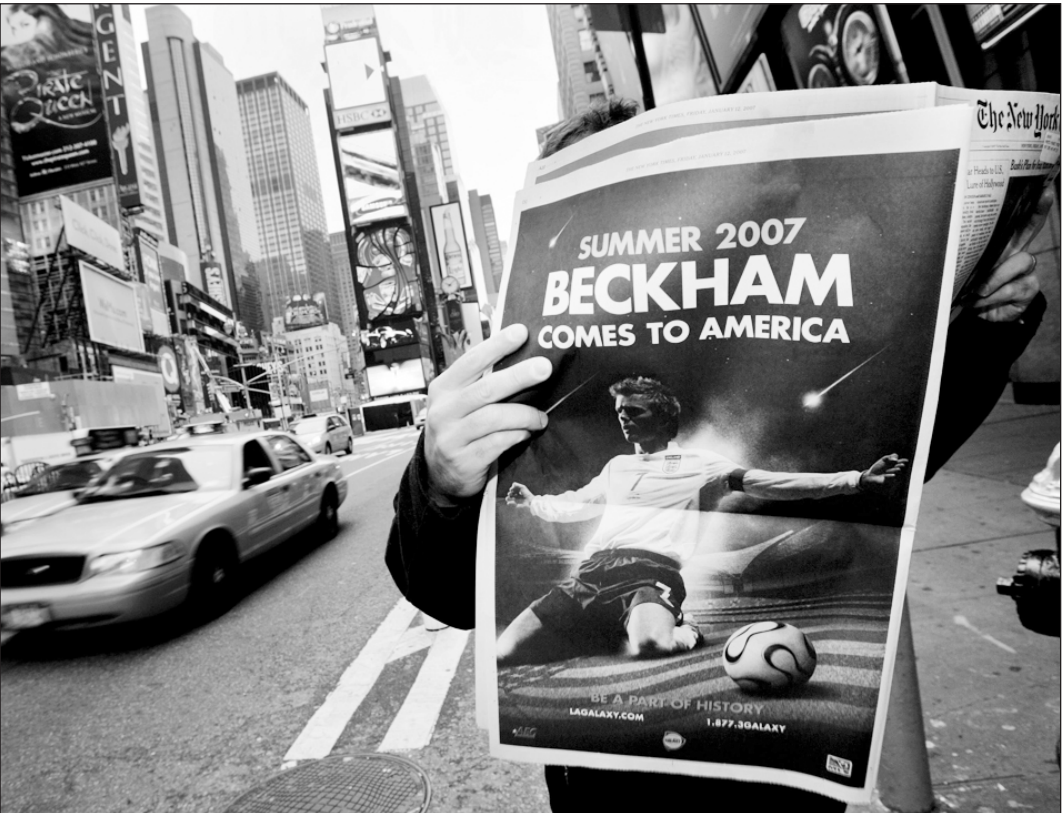


PHOTO: AFP

A man reads the New York Times, at the Times Square on Saturday, where a full-page advert announces the arrival of England star David Beckham in the summer of 2007.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	35 Answer to the Sphinx's riddle	53 Unadorned	11 Lamb's mama
1 Sleeve end	54 Diego preceder	19 Hot tub	
5 Kabuki alternative	36 Muddle with	21 Third degree?	
8 Wind indicator	37 Impoverished	23 Ceaselessly	
12 Norway's capital	40 Verdi opera	24 — uncertain terms	
13 Rage to	41 Marked exams	25 Oxidation result	
14 Swear	45 Calendar info	26 Luminox watch?	
15 Prognosticator	47 Affirmative action?	27 Head light?	
16 Tackle moguls	49 "— Only Just Begun"	28 Cooling drink	
17 Hackman or Autry	50 Actor Baldwin	32 Woody Allen movie	
18 Dangerous fly	51 St. Writer	33 Escape	
20 Incite	52 Unsettled Kingsley	35 Frenzied	
22 Still		36 Plant prickly	
26 Dishes		38 Relative	
29 Brit. reference work		39 Poet Nash	
30 Wilde-beest		42 Show-room sample	
31 Chantilly, e.g.		43 Satan's specialty	
32 Foundation		44 News-room furniture	
33 Clan (Lat.)		45 Weir	
34 Bullring bravo		46 Stout brew	
		48 Eggs	

Solution time: 25 mins.
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ALOE CAGED
AVERT OTHERS
FORKINTHEROAD
TNT NITER VIA
GALA DENY
SHALE SKIRT
AWABSPAT
SOS MOUES TILP
HOBSONSCHOLICE
TRIVIA WITTE
ORION TILLS
EEN RYE

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CRYPTOQUIP

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KFCY Q EVDCQFU TVQTRUFUO,

F THNNRTV YV GFOYC IV

CYV EQNVDS EDHTQSV D.

Yesterday's Cryptquip: WOULD YOU CALL THE FOLKS THAT DWELL IN FAR-OFF COUNTRY AREAS THE YOKEL RESIDENTS?

Today's Cryptquip Clue: V equals E

The Cryptquip 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.



PHOTO: INTERNET

A cartoon in British tabloid The Sun depicts David Beckham and his wife Victoria counting stacks of cash following Beckham's money spinning move to LA Galaxy.