

Wenger sceptic

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said 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.

"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 back-water 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 glamourising 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 stragglers 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."

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 Curtisby 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.

New dawn in salary universe

Football

AFP, Washington

A landmark 250 million-dollar, five-year deal has made David Beckham the world's highest paid footballer and could rewrite the US salary landscape for superstar athletes in other sports.

"It's an amazing amount of money," Beckham said. "This move for me is not about the money. It's about making a huge difference in the soccer in America."

Asked by ESPN if he would have left behind Real Madrid to join the Los Angeles Galaxy for the money, Beckham laughed and said: "I can't say that. They might take half of it away."

Tiger Woods remains to world's highest-paid sportsman according to Forbes magazine, having made 90 million dollars last year, while Carson Palmer tops out at 16.2 million and Jagr has a top year of 8.4 million dollars a year.

Beckham has a stake unlike any other US sport icon in the profits he will bring all clubs, something not even the mighty Michael Jordan produced during his days with basketball's Chicago Bulls.

"There are other great sports in America people have grown up with," Beckham said. "I'm not saying soccer will be as huge as those but there's a huge improvement to be made."

And a lot of money too, with Beckham having a stake in each and every one.

The 31-year-old Englishman has dwarfed the highest-priced giants in other US sports with a deal that includes merchandising tie-ins.

Alex Rodriguez has a 10-year deal worth 252 million dollars with baseball's New York Yankees while basketball star Shaquille O'Neal has a six-year contract worth 152 million dollars and gridiron standout Michael Vick makes 130 million over 10 years. Ice hockey's Jaromir Jagr makes 77 million over seven years.

Kevin Garnett has the top annual salary in basketball at 21 million dollars while Carson Palmer tops out at 16.2 million and Jagr has a top year of 8.4 million dollars a year.

Those deals are basically for sporting services, but that only scratches the surface for Beckham. Separate deals with entertainment industry and endorsement firms could be four times what Beckham makes with his fancy footwork.

"Whatever people think will justify that wage, that's up to other people to decide," Beckham said. "The money thing has never been important in my football career."

That's easy for Beckham to say after making a deal that should bring nearly one million dollars a week, which is almost 143,000 dollars a day or about 6,000 dollars an hour.

That's 100 dollars a minute for five years.

England's Daily Telegraph newspaper reported Beckham will make 10 million dollars a year in salary, 25 million dollars in sponsor deals, thanks to greater image rights freedoms, his own 10 million dollar merchandise deal and a profit-sharing pact with the team's owners.

Timothy Leiweke, president and CEO of the AEG ownership group that operates the Galaxy, would not talk specifics about Beckham's deal.

"A lot," he said when asked point blank what the AEG group - more specifically the Galaxy - would be playing Beckham.

He noted that 250 million dollars was the figure mentioned in an AEG press release on Friday - credited to "industry analysts" - and said the figure would be in line with Beckham's stature as a player and product endorser.

"I can assure you we made an economic deal."



"Oh blimey, not MORE money! We haven't finished counting yesterday's."

Lauren on way out

AFP, London

"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 mid-fielder 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."

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