



Reading midfielder Steve Sidwell (number 4) celebrates his goal with teammate Stephen Hunt and their mascot during their Premiership encounter at home to Aston Villa on Saturday.

## World class Rafalution

INTERNET, undated



Rafael Benitez accepts that life will be easier for him in the transfer market under Liverpool's new American owners.

But although he claims the club will never be the same again, he insists he does not feel any extra pressure working for owners who do not know his qualities and track record intimately.

And the Anfield chief believes the club is in for a major transformation following the midweek takeover by new co-chairmen George Gillett and Tom Hicks.

However, at the moment very little has changed. The American circus has returned across the pond and former chairman David Moores, still a director, will be in his usual seat in the directors' box when Liverpool face Newcastle on Tyneside in a crucial Premier League match.

Benitez sees only good in the future and, even if he has not been told how much money he will have to spend, he does reveal that he "will only now be looking to signing top class players."

Benitez, who will be missing the suspended Xabi Alonso at St James Park but expects to have Mohamed Sissoko finally back

from injury, said: "It has been a very important week and something that will change everything."

"We talked about the future of the club, not money or this player or that player. We talked about who we had in the squad and ideas for the future."

"They were nice people and good businessmen. That is a good mix, they can then do the right things for the club in terms of money and how we grow."

"They will try to do the things they are doing in the States with regard to marketing. That is what they are really good at. We can grow and improve."

He added: "It could be a problem of inflated fees now, but I am happy with my scouting department and we are doing a good job now without any big money."

"We have enough money to do business now and if we have more in the future it could be easier. If we have two players we like and one is more expensive, maybe now we can consider signing him."

"We are doing the right things now and maybe we will not need to spend big money in the summer."

Benitez, who takes his squad to Portugal on Monday for a five-day warm-weather training camp, dismisses talk of extra pressures on him, saying: "I do not feel under any more pressure. When you sign for a new club they may know

something about you but they do not really know you."

"So this situation is no different. They know enough about us, they are clever, certainly not stupid."

"They know how important it is to keep the same things, the players, the manager. They will be calm and give us support."

"Everything is positive, the future of the club is brilliant and I had a very good meeting with the new investors."

"They will do their best for club. Not just with money for signing players, they will try to improve everything."

"They know they do not have experience in football, but they are people who know about sport. That is important."

"We talked a lot about the ideas for the club, they will do the right things. They understand the passion of this club and our supporters."

"We have not talked about budgets, more ideas and how to keep the team at the top of the table to remain contenders."

"He added: "But I will have more money, normally that will make things easier. But I have said to them that it is not a problem of money, more to do the right things at the right moment."

"I have no figures in mind. But we have always been watching top class players, who we believe can improve the squad. We have a

really good squad now, but to make the next step higher we can only sign top class players."

"More money will make it better for us. Manchester United have spent big money on key players, and now we have the spine of a team maybe we can approach the market like they have done. But it is not going to be a Chelsea-situation here."

Benitez said: "We have plans to improve everything. The stadium, the squad, young players, everything that can be really good for the club."

"If we get a bigger stadium we will have more fans supporting us in every game and that will help. It will also bring in more money, and that is very positive."

"What we must do is to take the atmosphere from Anfield to the new stadium."

"We will continue doing the same things. I am talking to (chief executive) Rick Parry every day, we cannot stop doing what we have always done."

"First is Newcastle, then the rest of the season and then what we will do in the summer."

"I read that I will have 100million pounds in the summer, I know nothing of that. At the moment we do not have any money. We are just preparing for the future."

## Sidwell steers Reading home

AFP, Reading



Steve Sidwell scored twice as Reading kept their bid for an unlikely European place on course with a 2-0 victory against Aston Villa on Saturday.

Reading manager Steve Coppell has been playing down talk of his newly-promoted side qualifying for the UEFA Cup, but Sidwell's double at the Madejski Stadium clinched a fifth successive win to keep the dream firmly alive.

Sidwell was on target in either half to consolidate sixth place for Reading, while Villa remain marooned in the bottom half of the table.

Martin O'Neill spent big money in the January transfer window but his team remain frustratingly inconsis-

tent and have now lost six successive away matches.

Shaun Maloney was making his Villa debut after his one million pounds move from Celtic and the winger was quickly into the thick of the action.

He made a driving run into the Reading half before being brought down by Sidwell. Maloney picked himself to take the free-kick himself but was unable to test Marcus Hahnemann.

O'Neill's side had the better of the opening stages and Villa forward John Carew served notice of their attacking intent when he cut into the area and drove a shot just wide.

Carew's strike partner Ashley Young should have done better than glance a header wide from Gareth Barry's corner moments later.

Those misses were to prove costly. It took a fine save from

Thomas Sorensen to keep out James Harper's strike, but Villa's reprieve was short-lived.

Stephen Hunt's 16th minute corner to the near post wasn't dealt with by Villa and Sidwell stole in to score with a header that deflected off Phil Bardsley.

Leroy Lita has been in superb form recently, scoring nine in nine matches, and the Reading striker was close to another goal as Sorensen pushed away his low effort.

Villa were always a threat going forward and Maloney showed promise again when he forced Hahnemann to concede a corner with a fierce long range strike midway through the half.

Carew tested Hahnemann as well with a low strike that would have crept in at the far post if the American keeper hadn't got down well.

Reading had to ride their luck at the start of the second half as Villa searched for an equaliser.

Young created a half chance with a neat piece of skill on the edge of the Reading area but, despite tricking his way past Nicky Shorey, he could only drive wide.

Coppell's side were breathing a sigh of relief again when Young's shot deflected off Carew and, with Hahnemann beaten, looped onto a post.

Hahnemann quickly got to his feet to keep out Gabriel Agbonlahor's follow-up effort and that save proved decisive.

Sidwell put the result beyond doubt in the 90th minute as he played a one-two with Dave Kitson before slotting past Sorensen to ensure the hosts claimed a first win over Villa since 1912.

The Arsenal manager said officials needed to do something to halt the slide of international football.

"I think football has moved on and has moved more towards the clubs," said the Frenchman. "It is more exciting to watch club football now than it is to watch national football, and that's the same for England, France, Argentina, Brazil."

"Games are becoming boring. If you go to England against the Faroe Islands, no one will really be interested apart from their love of the country."

Wenger, whose Arsenal side host Wigan Athletic in the Premier League on Sunday, backed his foreign policy at the London club and said it was no hindrance to England.

"When I sign a player nationality doesn't come into it, it's all about quality," said Wenger. "If I give you a good wine, first you taste it if it's good then you ask where it comes from."

"You have to accept we live in a world that is down to quality. The only thing I can say is that whenever England do not win it is always my fault, even when I am not at the game."

Spain beat England 1-0 in a friendly in Manchester on Wednesday.

## Ronaldo set for debut

INTERNET, undated



Carlo Ancelotti has called Ronaldo for Sunday's Livorno game and confirms he could make his Milan debut.

"He will start from the bench. If the opportunity arises, then he will play," explained the Coach in his Press conference.

"Ronaldo has been doing well in training. He really wants to make the most of this opportunity to get back to the highest levels."

When he first arrived from Real Madrid in January, club doctors warned that Il Fenomeno would require around a month of training before he was ready for Serie A football.

However, the Brazilian has impressed with his tenacity and the fitness levels mean he could make his bow against Livorno this weekend.

"He is very motivated, disciplined and eager to prove himself.

Now above all he has to understand his teammates' movements and gel with them, but with the qualities he possesses, I doubt that will be difficult."

Milan are still awaiting the verdict from this morning's inspection on the Stadio Giuseppe Meazza, as the installation of 28 new turnstiles overnight could allow the presence of the season ticket holders on Sunday. If the new measures were rejected, then Ronaldo would be greeted by empty stands.

It was strongly rumoured that Real Madrid had requested Ricardo Oliveira as part of the Ronaldo move, but the Brazilian has stayed at San Siro.

"He is in good shape and I really hope with all my heart he can express that potential," continued Ancelotti.

"So far his form in training hasn't yet transferred to the match day. As Ronaldo is Cup-tied, Oliveira will be very important for us in the Champions League."

Pippo Inzaghi injured, Ronaldo's arrival is just in time to help the push for a Champions League place.

"Inzaghi has started running again and should be ready in the next few games. Serginho must not be rushed, but he is doing much better. Kakha Kaladze will be on the bench on Sunday and Alessandro Nesta is still in the States for specialist treatment, but should be completely healed by the time he returns."

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## Arsenal tie Rapids knot

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long term development partnership that will benefit both clubs significantly."

Edelman's views were echoed by Rapids managing director Jeff Plush.

"This groundbreaking partnership with Arsenal...is one of the stepping stones to continue pushing our sport on to the next level," said Plush.

"In today's international business community, soccer is the only truly global sport that transcends ethnicity, culture and language and with this type of relationship we are making sure our company is expanding this vision."

American billionaire Stan Kroenke, a property magnate, is the man behind KSE.

The deal comes just days after the takeover of Liverpool by American tycoons George Gillett and Tom Hicks, and represents an increasing trend of American businessmen buying into English soccer.

Manchester United and Aston Villa are also owned by American business tycoons.

Arsenal manager Arsene

Wenger dismissed the idea the deal was a takeover.

"Unless I am completely naive it is not a takeover," Wenger told reporters. "I have never heard about a possible takeover and I don't think that is at all behind our partnership."

Wenger said the link-up might help Arsenal recruit new young players.

"We develop a few partnerships sometimes with football schools and sometimes with clubs," said the Frenchman.

"We are also trying to extend our technical cooperation because the Americans might produce some players at some stage and that's why we are doing it. We are always trying to develop young players."

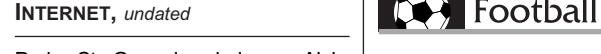
The Rapids will come to London to play at Arsenal's facilities for six days while they continue training ahead of the MLS season which starts in April.

Arsenal are involved in various other partnerships, notably with the Belgian club Beveren and an academy set up in the Ivory Coast.

Barca top the Liga table by a point from Sevilla, where 'El Conejo' - the rabbit - was on loan last season.

## PSG slam Cisse decision

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Paris St Germain chairman Alain Cayzac has slammed the league's discipline commission for not suspending Djibril Cisse. Marseilles striker Cisse broke Mario Yepes' ankle in a challenge during a Ligue 1 fixture last weekend, ruling the PSG defender out for the rest of the season.

Cayzac had called for Cisse to be handed a similar punishment to that dished out to PSG striker Pierre-Alain Frau, who was banned for eight weeks for a tackle on Sedan's Stephane Noro earlier in the season.

"This is an enormous scandal," Cayzac said, "and PSG won't stay quiet."

"In the same circumstances, for a similar tackle, Frau had been suspended for two months."

"That proves the sanctions were disproportionate and constituted an enormous damage to PSG."

"I will wait until I have more information until I say more, but it would seem that PSG have been mistreated by the U.S."

"I want explanations. There has been an error."

PSG are fourth from bottom in Ligue 1, just one point above the relegation zone.

"We are approaching this as a

Barcelona striker Javier Saviola says that he would never sign for Real Madrid and that Italy is his preferred destination, should he decide to leave the Blaugrana.

"Nothing is decided yet," he told Italian media. "I will not betray Barca -- that is for certain. I could not join Real Madrid."

"If I change team it will be for another experience to a foreign country."

"Barcelona is my first choice but I have other possibilities, mainly in Italy. I will wait to see the club's offer and then decide whether to accept it."

Juventus, who are chasing promotion to Serie A, are said to be leading the chase for the hit-man.

Saviola, 26, faces a tough decision.

He seems to be happy in Barcelona when he is playing and is ever popular with the club's fans, but barely featured this season under Frank Rijkaard prior to Christmas.

The injuries to Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi gave him a chance when he returned from his own knock in January and he has taken it impressively, scoring freely for Barca and also netting for Argentina against France in midweek.

Barca top the Liga table by a point from Sevilla, where 'El Conejo' - the rabbit - was on loan last season.

"We are doing well," said Saviola.

"I am happy with my team and the

support of the fans."