



PHOTO: AFP

Newcastle striker Obafemi Martins shoots to score against AZ Alkmaar during their UEFA Cup match at St. James' Park in Newcastle on Thursday.

# L'pool takeover close to completion

## Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool's takeover by George Gillett and Tom Hicks is close to completion after they told the stock exchange that they have bought 80.7 per cent of all shares in the Premiership club.

Gillett and Hicks have reached the 75 per cent take-up needed to make today's announcement of securing unconditional control.

The American businessmen need another 9.3 per cent to force a compulsory purchase of every share and have extended their

deadline to small shareholders willing to sell until March 26.

It is thought Gillett and Hicks met shareholders ahead of Tuesday's Champions League match against Barcelona and were told there would not be any significant shareholder who would be holding out.

Shareholders had been offered 5000 pounds per share from Gillett and Hicks' Kop Football Ltd company and Steve Morgan, previously the third-biggest shareholder with six percent, Terry Neill, who owns 3 per cent, are expected to sell up.

The statement to the Stock Exchange this morning confirmed the American pair yesterday (Thurs-

day) "received valid acceptances in respect of 28,089 Liverpool shares, representing approximately 80.7 percent of Liverpool's issued share capital to which the offer relates."

Liverpool chief executive Rick Parry claimed Gillett and Hicks' announcement was a momentous moment for the Reds.

"It is an historic day for the club," Parry told Liverpool's website. "It's obviously very pleasing to hear that George and Tom have reached the threshold they required and I'm sure they're equally delighted with the news."

"It's not come as a great surprise to us because from the moment we accepted the bid the response has

been positive. We'd heard earlier in the week a positive announcement was imminent.

"George and Tom were genuinely overwhelmed by their experience on Tuesday. They said they'd never felt anything like it, and the emphasis was very much on what they felt, not just what they'd seen."

"They'd heard all about the Anfield atmosphere on a European night, and we'd told them what it would be like, but only by experiencing it for themselves could they recognise what they'd only seen on video or DVD prior to Tuesday."

## Crouch has nose surgery

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool striker Peter Crouch had surgery on a nose injury on Friday that will rule him out of England's Euro 2008 qualifiers against Israel and Andorra.

Crouch, who sustained the injury after being kicked in the face by Sheffield United's Rob Hulse on February 24, had hoped to postpone the operation until the end of the season.

But he decided to go ahead with it now and is hoping to return to action against Reading on April 7, which means he will miss Liverpool's matches against Aston Villa and Arsenal as well as England's qualifiers on March 24 and 28.

## Badminton presses for equal pay

AFP, Birmingham

The Badminton Players Federation (BPF) is trying to capitalize on women having gained equal prize money at the Wimbledon tennis championships to demand equal prize money on badminton's new Super Series circuit.

A vote for equal prize money was carried unanimously at a BPF meeting yesterday (Tuesday) and now the BPF president Bobby Milroy will request the sport's governing body, the Badminton World Federation (BWF), does the same.

"If the BWF council doesn't get it act together we are going to be last sport in the Olympic movement to change to equal policy, and that's something I don't want to see," said Milroy.

"So that's why a month ago I decided to put it to the vote, and it turned out to be a unanimous vote."

The meeting contained 55 members of whom 21 were men, and the 55-0 result happened after Milroy spent much of the previous month talking to those men who had been sceptical.

"That was needed, especially with some of the men," he said. "There was passion in the debate, but generally I find the first reaction of the boys is to want to say yes, but then to ask 'doesn't my event have more commercial value?'"

"But when I bring up other points: the political ramifications and example of Wimbledon, which tried to stand up for men's rights for extra prize money -- there is no choice, you can't fight for that."

"The difference is two percent between the prize money so don't spend your time fighting for an extra one percent, you will be forced to change anyway. Generally boys understand this concept."

# Carlos to leave madrid

## Football

AFP, Madrid

Brazil's Roberto Carlos, one of the world's greatest footballers over the past decade, has announced he will leave Real Madrid at the end of the season, Marca newspaper reported on Friday.

The 34-year-old left back, who has been at the nine-times European champions since 1996/97, told the newspaper he had not yet informed his Spanish club of his decision but would do so soon.

Madrid were knocked out of the European Champions League in midweek and a possible fourth-trophyless season has left him looking to new horizons though he only signed

an extension to his contract till 2008, with an option for another year, in November.

"The moment has arrived for me to leave Real Madrid," he told Marca. "I am leaving at the end of the season and will not be renewing my contract. I think the moment has come to bring an end to my time here to allow the club to get on with new projects."

"I still don't know if I will stay in Europe and perhaps I need to be in Brazil near to my family. I am happy to have given a lot to Real Madrid and the club gave me everything. I will be forever grateful to them for that."

"But the time comes in life when you need to end things and the time has come for me to leave Real Madrid. After three years without winning anything, a decision had to be made and I think it was the best one I could

have made. The younger players must come through and take my place."

Madrid's away goals defeat by Bayern Munich, following the German club's 2-1 win at home on Wednesday, had the quickest goal in Champions League history when Roy Makaay found the net just 10 seconds after the Spanish club had kicked off. Roberto Carlos, who has won the European Champions League three times with Madrid -- in 1998, 2000 and 2002 -- had made an error which led to the goal.

Real Madrid have not lived up to their huge reputation this season and are fourth in the Spanish League, six points behind leaders Sevilla, and have won no major title since winning their domestic league in 2003.

# Bayern relieved

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich defender Willy Sagnol said on Friday his club were happier to face AC Milan than Chelsea in the quarterfinals

of the Champions League.

"The worst draw would have been to play against Chelsea," Sagnol said, adding: "AC Milan have had problems this season, like us, and they haven't managed to replace Andriy Shevchenko. I think our chances are 50-50."

Chelsea, who signed

Shevchenko from AC Milan in a 30-million-pound deal last year, will face Spanish club Valencia in the quarterfinals.

Philipp Lahm, the Bayern left-back who was one of the revelations of the 2006 World Cup, said he was looking forward to facing Milan, who eliminated Bayern at the last 16 stage of the competition last season.

"It will be good to take our revenge," Lahm said. "They are a typical Italian team, strong defensively with good individuals. It's not going to be easy."

Bayern beat Real Madrid on the away goals rule to reach the last eight after a pulsating 2-1 victory at

the Allianz Arena on Wednesday and club president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge promised another memorable night in Bavaria for the second leg of the tie on April 11.

"Everyone knows the result of last season against Milan (a 4-1 loss in the second leg of the last 16)," Rummenigge said. "That was not a glorious moment for us. This time maybe we can do something good."

"At least we have the advantage of the first leg being away but it will be hard and perhaps it is the tactics of Italian teams which do not suit us and they play defensively and with pragmatism. They give their all until the final seconds and wait for an error from their opponents."

## Ferguson respects Roma

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson insists Manchester United will not underestimate Roma when they meet in the Champions League quarterfinals.

United will face Roma for the first time in a competitive fixture after being paired with the Italian club in Friday's draw in Athens.

The first leg will be at Roma's Olympic Stadium on April 3 or 4 with the return at Old Trafford on April 10 or 11.

Roma may not be regarded as one of the favourites for the tournament, but they are currently second in Serie A and Ferguson believes their surprise win over French champions Lyon in the last 16 shows they must be treated with respect.

"We've never played Roma before so it'll be a new and exciting experience," Ferguson told ManUtd.com. "That's the great thing about Europe, you play teams you've never played before."

"We respect their last result (beating Lyon). They have some great players like De Rossi and Mancini."

"Obviously it's pointless looking beyond this game. We must concentrate on this game only. We're really looking forward to it."

If United, who beat Lille in the last 16, see off Roma they will play either AC Milan or Bayern Munich in the semifinals as the Premiership leaders try to repeat their 1999 treble triumph.

## FIFA lifts ban on Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

FIFA on Friday lifted a ban on Kenya from international football slapped on the country more than five months ago for failing to abide by the world sport body's regulations.

In a statement, FIFA said the decision to lift the ban followed positive developments in the east African nation in the wake of a visit to Nairobi by a Confederation of African Football (CAF) delegation in February.

The CAF team led by its vice-president Amos Adamu secured a declaration from the government not to interfere in the running of the Kenya Football Federation (KFF). FIFA said in a statement.

In addition, the government pledged to respect agreements reached with FIFA and to immediately dissolve a committee that was formed to oversee football in the country.

## Mourinho happy to play away

AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho is adamant he is not worried about playing away from home in the second leg of his side's Champions League quarterfinal against Valencia.

Chelsea will face a tricky trip to Valencia's intimidating Mestalla Stadium if they fail to build a significant advantage in the first leg in London on April 3 or 4.

Valencia have won 10 of their 12 home league matches this season and will fancy their chances in the return in Spain on April 10 or 11.

But Mourinho said: "For me it is not important. If you play the first game at home some people think the second leg away will be more difficult but sometimes it is more difficult to go away in the first game."

"If you don't win you are under pressure in the second game at home like happened to us against Porto. We got quite a good result in Porto but at half-time at Stamford Bridge we were going out of the competition, so it doesn't matter where the second game is played."

However, Valencia coach Quique Sanchez Flores, whose side are awaiting punishment for the brawl that marred their last 16 win over Inter Milan, believes the draw could have given his side a crucial advantage.

"The best news is that we are playing away in the first leg, which was a priority for us before the draw," he told Valencia's website. "That can be important, and even decisive."

"It will be a difficult tie but, next to Liverpool, they are the opponents most similar to us."

Mourinho added: "Every team is good and we all can smell the semi-final and final. For me the advantage can come from the fact that some teams are playing for a lot of things and other teams are playing just for the Champions League."

"If I play Valencia on Wednesday and I have no chances in the Premiership then I play my second team against Watford. But because I have chances I have to play my best team against Watford. This kind of situation can make a difference."

# Inter need derby tonic

AFP, Rome



Runaway Serie A leaders Inter Milan can ease some of the pain felt after their Champions League exit by defeating city rivals AC Milan

on Sunday and continuing their march towards the Scudetto.

Inter's misery at being dumped out of Europe by Valencia on Tuesday deepened when AC Milan reached the quarterfinals of the competition the next day with an extra-time victory over Celtic.

Docked eight points for their part in the Italian match-fixing scandal, AC Milan are unbeaten in their last 15 league games and sit just three points off the Champions League places for next season.

And Inter, 16 points clear at the top of the table, would love nothing more than to dent their neighbours' hopes of a top-four finish this week-end.

Adding more fuel to the fire will be Ronaldo's first appearance for AC Milan against Inter, his former

employers, who he walked out on in 2002 after the club had stood by him during a lengthy injury crisis.

Kaka, scorer of AC Milan's goal in Wednesday's 1-0 victory over the Scottish champions, said he expected the San Siro derby to be more intense than usual.

"Inter will be desperate to make up for the disappointment of going out of the Champions League and winning the derby would go some way to making up for that," said the creative Brazilian midfielder.

"But we too are charged up after reaching the last eight, so I expect it to be a superb match."

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini said beating Celtic was the ideal way to warm up for the derby.

"Qualifying for the quarterfinals of the Champions League has certainly given our morale a major boost," he said.

"Our target is to finish in the top four and a derby victory will help us do that."

Inter's Brazilian wingback Maicon, who has been a revelation for the club this season, is suspended while midfielders Esteban Cambiasso and Patrick Vieira are still injured.

Argentine defender Nicolas Burdisso, whose nose was broken in an ugly brawl after Inter's Champions League exit in Spain, is doubtful.

Alessandro Costacurta, Cafu, Kakha Kaladze, Alessandro Nesta and Serginho are all ruled out for AC Milan because of injury.

Second-placed Roma, who won 2-0 at French side Lyon on Tuesday to clinch their place in the last eight of the Champions League, play at home to Udinese.

Third-placed Palermo host Fiorentina while Lazio, in fourth spot, will be looking for their fifth consecutive win at struggling Reggina.

## FIXTURES

(1400GMT kick-off unless stated)  
**Saturday**  
Siena v Ascoli (1700), Torino v Catania (1930)  
**Sunday**  
Atalanta v Parma, Chievo v Messina, Empoli v Livorno, Inter v Milan, Palermo v Fiorentina, Reggina v Lazio, Roma v Udinese, Sampdoria v Cagliari



PHOTO: AFP

Italian rider Valentino Rossi of Yamaha pulls a wheelie during free practice at the Losail International Circuit on the outskirts of Doha on Thursday.

## MOTOGP SEASON STARTS TODAY

# Rossi targets title revenge

AFP, Losail, Qatar

Italy's five-time world champion Valentino Rossi said his disappointment in last year's championship has added to his motivation to win in 2007, starting with the season-opening race in Qatar on Saturday.

Rossi, who sensationally lost his world title to American Nicky Hayden in the final race in Valencia last year, topped Thursday's free practice session to prove his form on his Yamaha.

"Last year we made mistakes because we felt unbeatable," he said. "To come second once is good, it makes you come back more focused. I have good motivation and don't want to stop."

The Qatar race has dethroned Jerez, Spain, as the first race of the calendar and Rossi is hoping to make it three wins in a row on a circuit often made difficult by sand being blown onto the track.

Rossi said he only had himself to blame after being upstaged to the title last season which would have seen him win a sixth MotoGP title.

The end to the championship in 2006 was the most exciting ever.

Leader Hayden crashed in Portugal but then it was the turn of Rossi to fall in the following leg and final race of the championship in Valencia, Spain.

Rossi, who has won seven world titles all categories combined, added he was happy and confident on the run-up to the Qatar test and his brilliant showing in official practice in Jerez two weeks ago, where he won a BMW car following his victory, augurs well for his season.

"It's the first race and it's time to see if the work I have put in during the winter pays off," Rossi added. "Everyone is very excited and motivated and our aim is simple: to win."

"I like the Qatar circuit which is fast and fun and where I have already won twice. It gets hot and dusty and the tyre choice becomes very important."

The Italian, who clocked 1:56.464 to top free qualifying on Thursday, believed Spain's Dani Pedrosa was the most consistent during winter practice and would be his main rival for the 2007 title.

"But I think (reigning champion) Nicky Hayden, Loris Capirossi, and my own teammate Colin Edwards will all be battling for the championship," Rossi continued.

Hayden, third in 2004 and then second the following year in Qatar, is aiming to get on the podium in Saturday's race as he starts the defence of his title he won without much panache -- only two race wins in 2006 in the Netherlands and United States.

"I am proud to have the number one on my bike," Hayden said. "It's a childhood dream come true. I like the circuit and I did really well here last year but my aim is to go even better this time."

Pedrosa meanwhile has bad memories from last year's race after he made a poor start and eventually finished sixth. "It will be a close race," Pedrosa said.

Italy's Capirossi, who finished third last year, is also gunning to finish in the top three.

"This fast circuit suits our bikes and tyres," Capirossi said

and new Australian teammate Casey Stoner gave a reminder of his prowess on the circuit when he took pole position last year."

## Hammam re-elected as AFC chief

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Mohamed Bin Hammam has been re-elected unopposed to a second four-year term, with his position to be formalised in May.

The Qatari was the only candidate in the fray after the deadline passed on Thursday, the AFC said.

The 58-year-old was also unopposed when voted into office for his first term.

He will be formally sworn in during the AFC Congress in Kuala Lumpur in May.

Re-elected unopposed as AFC vice-presidents were Zhang Jilong from China, Vernon Manilal Fernando from Sri Lanka, and Tengku Abdullah Ibni Sultan Ahmad Shah from Malaysia.

Yousuf Yaqoob Yousuf Al Serkal of the United Arab Emirates was elected for the first time to be the fourth vice-president.

Meanwhile, South Korea's Chung Mong-joon was re-elected as FIFA vice-president and Japan's Junji Ogura and Thailand's Worawi Makudi retained their positions as FIFA Executive Committee members.