

Berbatov sticking with Spurs

AFP, London

Dimitar Berbatov insisted Saturday that he was more interested in helping Tottenham break into the Premiership's 'Big Four' than a move to an elite club.

The Bulgarian has scored 22 goals for Spurs since last summer's transfer from Bayer Leverkusen, leading to speculation that he will be the subject of a massive close-season bidding war.

But Berbatov is adamant he will be going nowhere.

"Manchester United, Liverpool, Chelsea and Arsenal -- some big names in football with great players, but nothing is impossible in football," he told SkySports News.

"I hope next season we can challenge this 'Big Four', like you see in England. Maybe we will be in the first four clubs."

Berbatov claims he will always be happy at White Hart Lane as long as Spurs continue to play their brand of attacking football. The club are currently sixth in the Premiership.

"The most entertaining thing this season is Spurs. We have scored so many goals, we tried to play good, we tried to entertain the fans," he said.

"To me that's one of the most important things -- to entertain, to enjoy when you play, because it's a game."

Allardyce holds Newcastle talks

AFP, London

Sam Allardyce has moved closer to becoming Newcastle manager after holding talks with chairman Freddy Shepherd.

Allardyce, who stepped down from his position as Bolton boss on April 29, is favourite to succeed Glenn Roeder, who resigned after last Saturday's 2-0 home defeat by Blackburn.

"It was a good meeting and my agent will speak to Newcastle again over the next few days to discuss matters further," Allardyce told The Sun.

Shepherd added: "Sam's excited and we're looking forward to making this work."

Allardyce, who turned down the chance to manage the Magpies three years ago, met Shepherd for lunch at London Claridge's hotel on Friday to discuss the proposed deal.

Panama seeks Rinkon's extradition

AFP, Panama City

Panama is preparing to formally request former Colombian football star Freddy Rinkon's extradition from Brazil so that he can be tried on drug trafficking charges, officials said Friday.

Authorities here accuse Rinkon, who was arrested at his house in Brazil this week, of being an associate of Colombian drug lord Pablo Rayo Montano in a money-laundering scheme in Panama.

Panama will substantiate the (extradition) document and send it to Brazil," Greta Marchosky, a foreign affairs official at the public ministry, told reporters.

Montano, who was arrested in Brazil last year in a US-led operation, is accused of heading a drug smuggling and money laundering network operating in Panama and Sao Paulo.

Rinkon has been accused of being an associate of Montano in several businesses in Panama that were used to launder money.

Rinkon has admitted to knowing Montano since his childhood in Colombia and having met up with him again in Brazil, but denies accusations that he collaborated with him in illegal activities.

The former midfielder played in three World Cups for Colombia's national squad. His club teams included such giants as Spain's Real Madrid and Sao Paulo's Corinthians.

Derby close to Premiership

AFP, Southampton

Steve Howard scored twice as Derby beat Southampton 2-1 in the first leg of their Championship play-off semifinal at St Mary's here Saturday.

The hosts took the lead when Andrew Surman struck from 20 yards before Howard levelled with a header and then gave Derby the lead with a penalty.

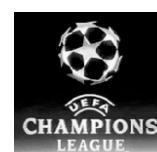
Marek Saganowski twice hit the crossbar for Southampton, while Jon Macken struck the woodwork for Derby.

The Rams finished the regular season in third place, just two points shy of automatic promotion, with Southampton sneaking into the play-offs in sixth spot.

After some fine football from the Saints, Howard scored the winning goal when keeper Bartosz Bialkowski got a hand to his penalty but could not prevent the ball from going into the bottom corner.

Kewell targets final

AFP, Liverpool



Harry Kewell plans to put himself in contention for Liverpool's Champions League final as Anfield prepares

to say an emotional farewell to striker Robbie Fowler on Sunday.

Having been sidelined with foot and groin problems all season, the Australian winger hopes to be involved from the start against relegated Charlton -- Liverpool's final game before facing AC Milan in Athens on May 23.

Kewell has not started a game for the Merseyside club since limping out of last season's FA Cup final yet insists he has had no reaction since making his long awaited return as a substitute in last Saturday's single goal defeat at Fullham.

"I've been working hard over the last eight weeks," said Kewell. "We did testing the other day, everything went well."

"The manager's happy, the assistant manager's happy, the fitness coaches are happy, so it's literally down to the manager."

"I'm feeling as close to 100 per cent as I've ever felt before in my life, the only thing I'm missing is competitive games."

Charlton's fight against relegation

gone, Liverpool's final league game promises to be an emotional affair as Fowler and Jerzy Dudek get ready to leave Anfield.

Former England striker Fowler was informed by Benitez earlier this week that his one-year contract will not be renewed when it expires next month.

Fowler has scored 183 goals in 368 games in two spells with the club, establishing him as the fifth most prolific forward in Liverpool's history.

Benitez will definitely start the 32-year-old against Charlton and may also make him captain-for-the-day.

The player will explore his options and Bolton, whose manager Sammy Lee coached Fowler at Anfield, could represent one potential destination. Jerzy Dudek will also bid goodbye to Liverpool, with the Polish goalkeeper out of contract next month.

Manager Alan Pardew knows "sacrifices" will have to be made throughout the club as they look to make up an estimated £20million shortfall in basic income next season.

Charlton will have defender Ben Thatcher available following his one-match suspension.

With on-loan goalkeeper Scott Carson ineligible to play against his parent club, young Irishman Darren Randolph, who turns 20 on Saturday, could well make his debut.

Charlton's fight against relegation

ended last Monday, a tame home defeat to Tottenham bringing seven seasons of top-flight football at The Valley to a close.

Yet winger Darren Ambrose insists the team owe their loyal supporters a performance at Anfield.

"The fans have been fantastic during this fight we have had and we are going to do our utmost to try to get a good result at Liverpool," said Ambrose.

"We have still got to go up to Liverpool and play another game and we are going to work hard in training and try to produce a result that we want and the fans need."

Behind the scenes, talk of a Middle East-based takeover continues and it remains to be seen whether or not the likes of England duo Darren Bent or Luke Young remain at The Valley.

Manager Alan Pardew knows "sacrifices" will have to be made throughout the club as they look to make up an estimated £20million shortfall in basic income next season.

"I have not seen such conduct during my entire career," complained Pardew.

"I have always been honest and professional with the teams I have dealt with in the past. I have no need for money, for me honesty counts."

He added that the Greek club owes him 390,000 euros and that he has promised to give half of that money to his foundations in Brazil and Spain.

When Rivaldo came to Olympiakos, Kokkalis then called it "the biggest transfer ever made in soccer in Greece."

The midfielder was 1999 World Player of the Year and 2002 World Cup winner.

Rivaldo quits Olympiakos

AFP, Athens

Brazilian superstar Rivaldo announced bitterly Saturday that he is quitting Greek champions Olympiakos, saying the club did not keep its promises to him.

Rivaldo, 34, had been with the team for the last three seasons and received a reported 1.9million euros (2.5 million dollars) annually.

A bitter Rivaldo said at a press conference that he will not attend Sunday's ceremonies by Olympiakos to celebrate yet another championship during their final match at home against last-place Ionikos Piraeus.

Rivaldo said that for the last 15 days he had made efforts to meet personally with Olympiakos boss Socrates Kokkalis to discuss a new contract, but without response.

"I have not seen such conduct during my entire career," complained Rivaldo.

"I have always been honest and professional with the teams I have dealt with in the past. I have no need for money, for me honesty counts."

He added that the Greek club owes him 390,000 euros and that he has promised to give half of that money to his foundations in Brazil and Spain.

When Rivaldo came to Olympiakos, Kokkalis then called it "the biggest transfer ever made in soccer in Greece."

The midfielder was 1999 World Player of the Year and 2002 World Cup winner.

UEFA upholds Lille fine

AFP, Geneva

UEFA said Friday that it had rejected an appeal by French club Lille against their fine over incidents that marred their Champions League match against Manchester United in February.

European football's governing body fined Lille 100,000 Swiss francs (60,472 euros) for security violations after crowd trouble during the match at nearby Lens.

UEFA said on its website that its appeals body upheld the fine for "violation of binding safety and security provisions" during the home leg of the tie against Manchester United on February 20, which Lille lost 1-0.

"UEFA came to its decision after studying documents submitted by Lille and hearing the position of the UEFA disciplinary inspector," it added.

United were fined 9,256 euros in March for incorrect behaviour by the travelling fans including disturbances at the turnstiles.

Tear gas was used by police during the match at Len's Stade Felix-Bollaert after ticketing problems led to 5,000 supporters cramping into a stand built for 3,500.

Supporters appeared to be in danger of being crushed against a 10-foot high safety barrier and fans were lifted over the barrier while security officials slammed shut a gate which had been pushed open by United supporters trying to relieve the pressure.

Lille players also briefly left the pitch during the match after Ryan Giggs's quickly-taken free kick took everyone by surprise and gave Manchester United their winning goal. UEFA's statement Friday made no mention of that incident.

Schumi rules out F1 return

INTERNET, undated

Michael Schumacher has ruled out moving into Formula One team management in the future.

The seven-time world champion called time on a 16-year career behind the wheel late last year but made an appearance on the practice day at the Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona as a guest of Ferrari -- for whom he won five titles.

And when asked if he fancied returning to the sport to manage Ferrari -- or anybody else -- in the future, he said: "Absolutely not. I just don't want to. I have other ambitions in life other than that one."

Schumacher's swift response contradicts that of his manager Willi Weber, who said earlier this year that he could easily see the 38-year-old German returning in a management role.

His current involvement in Formula One is as an advisor for Ferrari, although he would not be drawn on the specifics of that role. He did however say that he has been enjoying life away from the spot-light.

"Well, it is certainly very obvious that there is a life after Formula One," he added.

"After being 16 years here, it has been an interesting experience not to wake up every morning and think about it. (You are) just thinking about other things like the family and so on. It has been very exciting."

Schumacher will remain in Barcelona for the Spanish GP weekend.

Massa pips Alonso for pole

AFP, Barcelona

bigr flag-waving crowd.

Massa's Ferrari teammate Finn Kimi Raikkonen was third fastest ahead of Alonso's McLaren Mercedes team-mate British rookie Lewis Hamilton, 22, who was fourth fastest.

Poland's Robert Kubica was fifth in a BMW ahead of Italian Jarno Trulli in a Toyota, German Nick Heidfeld in the second BMW, Finn Keiki Kovalainen in a Renault, Briton David Coulthard in a Red Bull and Italian Giancarlo Fisichella in the second Renault.

The session began again in hot and dry conditions with the air temperature recorded at 27 degrees Celsius and the track at 48. This meant virtually ideal conditions for the teams and the spectators on a day when there were chaotic long queues outside the circuit during the morning.

On the action started, the usual suspects soon dominated proceedings with Hamilton, who was fastest in the morning's fastest practice session ahead of his McLaren team-mate Alonso, among the pace-setters.

The first part of qualifying saw the removal of the slowest six drivers.

The session began again in hot and dry conditions with the air temperature recorded at 27 degrees Celsius and the track at 48. This meant virtually ideal conditions for the teams and the spectators on a day when there were chaotic long queues outside the circuit during the morning.

The 25-year-old from Sao Paulo, in a Ferrari, clocked the fastest time in the third mini-section of the session of one minute and 21.421 seconds to outpace 25-year-old Spaniard Alonso by just three-hundredths of a second.

It was Massa's third successive pole and the sixth of his career and he will start Sunday's race at the Circuit de Catalunya alongside the local hope from Oviedo who looked sure of the prime starting spot until the final seconds.

Then, after Massa had already clocked his best time of the part-session, Alonso was on his final flying lap and unable to beat his rival's time, much to the dismay of a

big crowd.

Hamilton was second and Alonso third.

Hamilton was third and Alonso fourth.

Hamilton was third and Alonso fourth.