



A Greek fan wearing a traditional costume waves a Liverpool flag among revelling Liverpool fans in Athens on Wednesday.

## Federer tipped for French success

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Pete Sampras on Wednesday tipped world number one Roger Federer to win the French Open after his breakthrough victory over arch-rival Rafael Nadal on clay.

"I think Roger has a good shot to win the whole thing, there is no reason why he can't," Sampras said in a telephone interview from Los Angeles.

"He just proved that he can beat Nadal on clay, he just beat him the other day."

Federer ended the Spaniard's record-breaking 81-match winning streak on clay by beating him 2-6, 6-2, 6-0 last Sunday at the Hamburg Masters, boosting his confidence ahead of Roland Garros which starts on Sunday.

If he wins in Paris, Federer will become the first player since Rod Laver in 1969 to hold all four Grand Slams at the same time.

"Nadal has had a great run and probably just ran into a wall at Hamburg," said Sampras.

While Nadal is seen as Federer's main threat, Sampras pointed out that there were others to watch, and named Russia's Nikolay Davydenko as among the "dangerous players."

Sampras, who won a record 14 Grand Slam titles, returned to competitive tennis this month for the first time since retiring in 2002 in the over-30s Champions Cup.

Both Sampras and Federer will play an exhibition match in Kuala Lumpur in November during the inaugural Malaysian open.

# No solution to MU's Asia row



AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) held a "cordial" meeting with Manchester United Wednesday but failed to resolve a lingering row over the Premier League champion's Asian tour.

AFC president Mohamed bin Hammam, who wants the tour postponed, met with Premier League chairman Sir Dave Richards and Manchester United chief executive David Gill but neither side backed down.

"We have presented our case to Manchester United and fully explained our position," bin Hammam said after the two-hours of talks, adding that he appreciated Gill and Richards making the trip for a face-to-face meeting.

The standoff was sparked two weeks ago when bin Hammam called United "disrespectful" for scheduling their tour during the Asian Cup finals, the region's flagship competition from July 7-29.

"At the end of the day, we have not left any stone unturned to seek a solution amicably, and we very much hope that we can all seek a compromise to protect the interests of the AFC Asian Cup 2007 and the development of Asian football."

"We have made the request, and we shall await the response," bin Hammam said.

An AFC official described the meeting as "cordial", and stressed that "the ball is in Manchester United's court."

The official added that United have contractual obligations to third parties which need to be resolved before any commitments can be made to the AFC.

Gill and Richards slipped out of a side door at AFC House to avoid the waiting media and made no comment.

They later met with Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) secretary-general Ibrahim Saad and deputy president Tengku Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, who remain convinced the Malaysia game will go ahead.

"As far as we are concerned, the cabinet has made a decision that the game will go on. We will proceed with it," Ibrahim Saad told AFP.

"But we will not be involved in any of the promotion and publicity. As far as we are concerned, our priority is the Asian Cup."

Bin Hammam, backed by FIFA president Sepp Blatter, wants Manchester United's game against a Malaysian XI on July 27 and the rest of their tour to South Korea, Jaolan and Macau called off.

The AFC say Malaysia, through its Sports Ministry, gave an undertaking that it would honour its commitments to the Asian Cup as one of four host nations, which includes not holding any other football matches while it is on.

During the meeting with Gill and Richards, bin Hammam emphasised "the contractual obligations of Malaysia and FAM as a host association."

Last week he warned of "wide-ranging legal repercussions" if United visit Malaysia during the tournament.

The Red Devils though have the support of the government, which invited them as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations of independence.

Tourism Minister Tengku Adnan Mansor reiterated to AFP Wednesday that as far as his ministry was concerned the match was still on.

"We are sad AFC's (president Mohamed Bin) Hammam is unable to compromise," he said after the government's weekly cabinet meeting.

"We have no problems. Malaysia will stick to the date of the Manchester United tour. We want to host this tour. Tourism Malaysia is committed to the tour. As far as we are concerned, July 27 is fixed."

United plan to kick off their pre-season commercial tour against J-League champions Urawa Red Diamonds on July 17 in Saitama before heading to the South Korean capital for a showdown with FC Seoul on July 20.

Alex Ferguson's team then travel to Macau for a match against Shenzhen on July 23, before ending the tour in Kuala Lumpur against a Malaysian XI.

## Ballack set for Germany return

AFP, Frankfurt

German captain Michael Ballack looks set to make his return from injury after being named by Germany coach Joachim Loew on Tuesday in his squad for the Euro 2008 qualifiers against San Marino and Slovakia next month.

Ballack, who has not played for last weekend's FA Cup winners Chelsea for a month after undergoing an ankle operation, was called up along with Per Mertesacker and Mario Gomez, who have also recovered from injury.

Loew will, however, have to do without the injured trio of striker Lukas Podolski and midfielders Bastian Schweinsteiger and Tim Borowski, who are all sidelined with knee injuries, for the matches on June 2 and June 6.

Germany lead Group D with 13 points, equal on points with the Czech Republic and the Republic of Ireland, who have played one and two matches more respectively.

**Goalkeepers:** Jens Lehmann (Arsenal/ENG), Timo Hildebrand (Stuttgart)

**Defenders:** Gonzalo Castro (Bayer Leverkusen), Manuel Friedrich (Mainz 05), Clemens Fritz (Werder Bremen), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich), Christoph Metzelder (Borussia Dortmund), Marcell Jansen (Borussia Monchengladbach)

**Midfielders:** Michael Ballack (Chelsea/ENG), Torsten Frings (Werder Bremen), Roberto Hilbert (Stuttgart), Thomas Hitzlsperger (Stuttgart), Simon Rolfes (Bayer Leverkusen), Bernd Schneider (Bayer Leverkusen), Jan Schlaudraff (Alemania Aachen), Piotr Trochowski (Hamburg)

**Strikers:** Mario Gomez (Stuttgart), Patrick Helmes (Cologne), Miroslav Klose (Werder Bremen), Kevin Kuranyi (Schalke 04).

## Chelsea secure Sidwell for free

AFP, London

Deposed English Premiership champions Chelsea secured their first signing of the close season on Tuesday when they signed highly-rated defensive midfielder Steve Sidwell from rivals Reading on a free transfer.

The 24-year-old former England Under-21 international turned down a 25,000 pounds a week four year contract offer from Reading to join the recent FA Cup winners after his contract expires on July 1.

Chelsea beat off offers from champions Manchester United and Newcastle.

Sidwell -- who scored four times in 35 Premiership matches last term -- gained so much interest after a series of eye-catching performances for Reading on their debut in the Premiership where they defied expectations of being relegated to finish eighth, one place outside winning a UEFA Cup spot.

# Distin signs for Pompey

INTERNET, undated



Portsmouth have signed former Manchester City captain Sylvain Distin on a free transfer.

The centre-half has agreed a three-year contract at Fratton Park after deciding to leave City following five years at the club.

Pompey boss Harry Redknapp had been interested in signing Distin last season but the Frenchman, 29, opted to see out the final year of his deal at the City of Manchester Stadium.

He left the club on Tuesday claiming he was seeking a new challenge.

Distin, who cost 4m pounds when he joined the Blues from Paris St Germain in 2002, could soon be joined by Ghana midfielder Sulley Muntari, who is expected to become the next of Redknapp's summer captures.

Distin said he was delighted to join an ambitious side and admitted: "Harry Redknapp was a big influence. I like the way his teams play and this is definitely a club on the way up."

"I was five years at Manchester City and made a lot of friends there. It was a tough decision but it was my decision and I am happy to stick by it."

"You have got to have ambition and for me that means trying to push for Europe. Portsmouth are

capable of doing that, more than capable, and that's why I am here."

"When you are on a free transfer you are going to get a lot of offers but this is the one I wanted to take."

Boss Redknapp revealed he panicked when he heard that rivals from the Premiership's top four, with Liverpool one of the teams linked with a late bid, had moved in on Tuesday night.

Redknapp said: "I've been down that road a few times before and to be honest I panicked when I heard about it."

"But thankfully we struck an agreement with Sylvain and I am really pleased we've got him."

"Last year when we showed an interest in him his price was £5million so to get him for free has got to be great business for the club."

"I have been an admirer for a long time. He's a fantastic player, left-sided and good in the air and very powerful."

Redknapp also put to bed rumours that Sol Campbell, last summer's major transfer coup, would be moved out to accommodate Distin.

He said: "There is no way. Sol is still absolutely key for us. He has still a year to go on his contract and he's not going anywhere."

"I will try, in fact, to sign another defender very soon because you have to have competition for places and a big squad. The Premiership is going to be tougher than ever next season and if you stand still you end up going backwards."

Redknapp admitted one of his targets could be Titus Bramble who has been recently released after five years at Newcastle. Redknapp said: "He's still a young player with plenty of potential and we will wait and see. He could be another outstanding free transfer."

Redknapp also admitted he has made an offer to Middlesbrough's out-of-contract Australian striker Mark Viduka and said: "Mark will make up his own mind. He has plenty of offers but we are looking to improve all around. We will need more goals and we have the money available to spend. The chairman is ambitious."

But next likely arrival at Fratton Park should be Muntari who will cost around 7m pounds from Italian club Udinese.

Redknapp said: "We are very close to getting him and I am keeping my fingers crossed."

"He is a fantastic midfielder, strong and quick and with an eye for goal and he is only 22."

It is believed that personal terms have already been agreed with the World Cup star whose arrival would shatter Portsmouth's transfer record -- the 4.4m-pounds they paid for Auxerre striker Benjani Mwaruwari.

And Charlton's Icelandic defender Hermann Hreidarsson is also in Redknapp's sights. He admitted: "He is a player I like very much. West Ham, I heard, bid 2m-pounds for him not long ago and he's another one to watch out for."

# Ribery, Quaresma on Bayern hit-list



AFP, Berlin

French World Cup star Franck Ribery and Portuguese midfielder Ricardo Quaresma top the list of players Bayern Munich want to sign to reverse their fortunes after a poor season, a report said on Wednesday.

Bayern's bosses believe they can tempt Ribery, who is currently with French club Marseille, although the midfielder has said he would prefer a move to England or Spain, Sport-Bild magazine said, quoting club sources.

Although Bayern also pursued 24-year-old Ribery after he helped France reach the World Cup final in

Germany last year, FC Porto's Quaresma is a new name on Bayern's list.

Quaresma, 23, is also attracting interest from the English Premiership and Spanish club Atletico Madrid.

Other targets are Arjen Robben, the flying Dutch winger who has struggled to hold down a first-team place at English Premiership giants Chelsea.

One barrier to recruiting big name stars is the fact that Bayern failed to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in 11 years as they finished fourth in the Bundesliga behind newly crowned champions VfB Stuttgart.

Italian international striker Luca Toni is definitely expected to join Bayern from Fiorentina for a fee of

around 18 million euros, the report said.

Toni's imminent arrival was confirmed by club president Franz Beckenbauer who said the transfer was "on the right tracks".

Ze Roberto, the muscular Brazilian midfielder who left Bayern in 2006, is expected to return to the Allianz Arena to fill the hole created by the departure of Owen Hargreaves to Manchester United.

And 21-year-old German international defender Marcell Jansen is almost certain to move to Bavaria after his club, Borussia Monchengladbach, were relegated this season.

However, Bayern's interest in Barcelona playmaker Deco has faded as the player has said he wants to stay at the Nou Camp.



PHOTO: AFP

Australia's Sydney FC midfielder Steve Corica fires a free-kick while Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds players jump to block during a Group E match of the AFC Champions League at Saitama Stadium on Wednesday. Red Diamonds drew 0-0 with Sydney FC to clinch a place in the AFC Champions League quarterfinals.

# Juventus 'agree' laquinta deal



INTERNET, undated

Juventus have reportedly reached an agreement to sign Udinese striker Vincenzo Iaquinta at the end of the season.

The World Cup winner has been paired with the Turin outfit for some time even though he extended his contract in Udine until 2010 last year.

A move now seems on the horizon though after the respected Gazzetta dello Sport claimed that a deal has already been done.

Iaquinta, a 27-year-old forward, will put pen to paper on a five-year contract with the Old Lady of Italian

football.

The transfer operation will allegedly cost Juventus 5.7m-pound plus the co-ownership of Michele Paolucci, who is currently on loan at Ascoli.

Iaquinta is understood to have been accepted by boss Didier Deschamps and the player's versatility could be useful on their return to Serie A.

Meanwhile, Juventus sporting director Alessio Secco was spotted in Rome where he is said to have met with Roma counterpart Daniele Pradè.

It is believed that the two men discussed the future of Philippe Mexes who may leave the capital this summer seeing as his

## Chelsea linked with Tevez deal

INTERNET, undated

West Ham's Carlos Tevez has been offered to Chelsea in a deal that would cost the club 35million pounds.

According to the Daily Express the Argentine striker could well move across London from Upton Park to Stamford Bridge after preliminary talks began between the FA Cup winners and the player's representatives.

Tevez has returned to South America to be with his wife and family but the Hammers are still hopeful he will agree to stay with them for another season, especially given their Premiership survival.

Kia Joorabchian is due to meet with West Ham chairman Eggert Magnusson this week about



PHOTO: AFP

An AC Milan fan holds aloft a banner pronouncing his loyalty to Milan and their Brazilian superstar Kaka at the central Athens Syntagma square on Wednesday on the eve of their Champions League clash against Liverpool.