

Tevez waiting for Real Madrid

AFP, London

West Ham's Argentina striker Carlos Tevez has been contacted by Real Madrid, but is still awaiting a concrete offer from the newly-crowned Spanish champions, his agent Adrian Ruocco claimed Monday.

Tevez helped West Ham stay in the Premier League with a string of match-winning displays, but as the controversy over who actually owns him continues he has been linked with most of Europe's top clubs this summer.

But it appears that the 23-year-old, valued at around 30 million pounds (59 million dollars), would prefer a move to the Santiago Bernabeu.

"There's been contact with Real Madrid," Ruocco told The Sun.

"We've been patient but if Real don't make a concrete offer then Carlos has a lot of options."

"He has offers from Europe's biggest clubs. But there's no need to rule out anything - including staying at West Ham where he is settled and wanted."



PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona captain Carles Puyol (L) takes an acrobatic dive to celebrate scoring against Gimnastic Tarragona during their Primera Liga encounter at the Nou Estadi in Tarragona on Sunday.

'We threw it away'

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona had to settle for second best on Sunday in the first Spanish title race to finish level on points since 1994, despite handing a 5-1 thrashing to bottom club Gimnastic Tarragona.

The Spanish champions for the last two years handed over their title to Real Madrid on the basis of their bitter rivals, who beat Real Mallorca 3-1, having a better head-to-head record after both teams finished level on 76

points.

It was an anti-climactic end to a season that had started with so much promise for Barcelona, who had also won the Champions League in 2006.

"This should serve as a lesson for the coming year. After winning La Liga and the Champions League in 2006, I think we were over-confident and that has been our principal problem," admitted Barca playmaker Xavi Hernandez.

"We threw away the league. I think this group of players still has plenty to offer but that now doesn't depend on the players."

Barca goalkeeper Victor Valdes said: "It's a tragedy that Mallorca couldn't hang on for a draw."

"Real Madrid had everything in their favour so it was normal they came out on top. What a way to go if this was to be my last game with Barca," said Brazilian defender Thiago Motta, who could move in the summer.

It could also be the last game at Barca for coach Frank Rijkaard,

despite his successes in the last two seasons.

Rijkaard has lost the confidence of many Barca fans despite his achievements, although losing key players Samuel Eto'o and Lionel Messi for several months in the middle of the season through injury didn't help.

"The people who are responsible for this situation are the players. Throughout all the season we have been very erratic," said Rijkaard's main ally in the dressing room, club captain Carles Puyol.

"I have to congratulate Real Madrid though, they had a lot of confidence, a lot of faith and in the end they got their prize."

"I have always said that the league goes to those that deserve it," added Puyol.

"But we can return to the heights (of previous years) if we learn from our errors."

Hamilton's second in a row

EUROSPORT, undated



Britain's Lewis Hamilton has played down his chances of becoming Formula One's first rookie world champion, despite an extraordinary start to his career.

The 22-year-old McLaren driver won his second race in a row in the United States to increase his championship lead to ten points over his Spanish team-mate Fernando Alonso and has finished on the podium in every one of his seven races.

But with over half the season still to go, including an intensive four races in five weeks in September and October, he is keeping his expectations in check.

"Yes, we're seven races into the championship, I have to be smart and realise that I'm running at the

front and there is a possibility of winning the championship," Hamilton said.

"But I still think it's far, far too early to even think about it or get any hopes up."

"Anything can happen during the season, I just have to try and remain consistent and try to keep on winning."

"But, you know, as many points from each race is good for the team and also for me. So I'm sure that's what me and Fernando are going to try to do."

McLaren's one-two finish at Indianapolis was the team's third of the season, making this their most successful season since 2000 when Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard locked out the front positions four times.

It also saw their lead in the constructors' championship increase from 28 to 35 points over nearest rivals Ferrari.



PHOTO: AFP

British McLaren-Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the United States Grand Prix at Indianapolis on Sunday.

Kaka is the best: Pele

INTERNET, undated

Pele has dubbed AC Milan midfielder Kaka 'the best player in the world', ahead of Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo.

Real Madrid target Kaka, 25, was in sparkling form in Europe this season and won Pele's admiration after leading AC Milan to a seventh Champions League/European Cup crown.

The Brazil international finished as top scorer in the competition with 10 goals, including three in the Rossonei's 5-3 aggregate semifinal win against United.

"Kaka is the best player in the world, without a doubt," said Pele in Italian sports daily *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

Kaka and Portugal international Ronaldo have arguably been the stars of European football this past season, with the media and pundits alike clamouring to have their say on who is the more talented of the two.

Ronaldo, 22, recently won the English PFA Players' Player and Young Player of the Year awards, and walked off with the 2007 Portuguese Footballer of the Year going in the wake of his starring role in United's successful Premiership campaign.

But for Pele, compatriot Kaka has the edge over the talented winger.

"Cristiano Ronaldo is the best player in England," he added. "But from that to being the best player in the world there is still some way."

"Kaka is a player with great quality and that makes him stronger than Cristiano Ronaldo and that will help him become one of the best players ever."

Nakamura in Japan squad

AFP, Tokyo

Celtic midfielder Shunsuke Nakamura, the most valuable player of the 2004 Asian Cup, will return to defend Japan's title next month, spearheading the squad announced here Monday.

Frankfurt striker Naohiro Takahara - who scored five goals in the 2000 championship - was also named in the squad alongside Nakamura.

Japan coach Ivica Osim named 30 players in the bid to win a third straight continental title thanks to a new regulation that includes seven reserve players to take account of injuries.

Osim, who guided the former Yugoslavia to the 1990 World Cup quarterfinals, plans to decide on the 23 starting players only days before the team's opening match on July 9. J-League games continue until the end of June.

"We have more time to make selections. I must think about that as we have three more games in the J-League and players may get injured," said Osim.

"Among the participating countries, Japan are the only one where a league competition is still being played and we don't have enough time to prepare. It's a big disadvantage."

Of other Europe-based players, Osim did not call up Basel's Koji Nakata or Frankfurt's Junichi Inamoto, but he denied it was because their poor performances in the Kirin Cup two weeks ago.

Japan will play 2006 Asian Games gold medallists Qatar on July 9, the United Arab Emirates on July 13 and minnows Vietnam on July 16 in the Asian Cup co-hosted by Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand.

Blatter in SA for inspection

AFP, Johannesburg

FIFA president Sepp Blatter arrived in South Africa on Monday for talks with organisers of the 2010 football World Cup and for his first on-site inspection of work to build and upgrade the stadiums.

"He arrived this morning and we are expecting him at SAFA (South African Football Association) House where he will hold a meeting with the 2010 board," said Tim Modise, spokesman for the Local Organising Committee (LOC).

"He will be in Cape Town tomorrow to inspect some 2010 projects, including the Green Point Stadium, and also meet government officials, including President (Thabo) Mbeki."

This will be the Swiss's first visit to the 2010 World Cup hosts since work began to build and upgrade stadiums.

Blatter said last September he wanted to see "pickaxes and shovels" swing into action but he appears to have been reassured by the start of work at all the sites since then, saying last month that "everything is going smoothly" and only a "natural disaster" could stop South Africa from hosting the tournament.

The tournament will be the first time that Africa has hosted the event, which is expected to attract up to half a million foreign visitors.

A Real fairytale

AGENCIES, Madrid



LFP

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Meanwhile, Real coach Fabio Capello admitted two mistakes in his handling of the former England captain.

"I was wrong about two things this season. Firstly, not renewing Beckham's contract. Secondly, keeping him apart from the team," admitted Capello, when asked whether he would have done anything different in the wake of Real winning a record 30th league title.

Capello had advised Real president Ramon Calderon last autumn that Beckham didn't figure in his long term plans and, with his contract coming to an end this season, Beckham started negotiations with American side LA Galaxy.

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His replacement Juan Antonio Reyes then scored twice as Madrid battled back for a 3-1 win.

"It's been an incredible experience but all I remember now is the great things. Winning this tonight now puts us to bed everything else."

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The rest of the Real squad, including David Beckham, stayed on an open-top bus.

The Madrid authorities decided to restrict the number of players climbing Cibeles this year after recent incidents when Real squads have damaged the statues.

For many years, the city paid for repairs but the last two mayors of Madrid have also presented Real with the bill for damage sustained by the monuments.

The arrival of the Real squad - decked out in jerseys saying Campeones (Champions) with the number 30 on them - seemed to be the catalyst for the crowd disturbances.