



PHOTO: AFP

The Dutch players celebrate their third goal against Serbia in the final of the U21 European Championship that they won 4-1 at Groningen on Saturday.

# Owen intends to stay

Football

TIMES ONLINE

Newcastle United are increasingly confident that Michael Owen will remain at the club next season, a development that will provide early validation for the new regime at St James' Park. While Manchester United and Liverpool harbour an interest in the England striker, other targets are being pursued more vigorously, allowing his present employers to plan for life with their record signing in tow.

That news will be welcomed by Sam Allardyce, the manager, as well as by supporters, whose delight at the prospect of Mike Ashley's 133 million pound takeover has been tempered by speculation surrounding Owen and Obafemi Martins, his teammate. Both forwards have release clauses in their respective contracts, but it is thought unlikely that Owen's will be triggered this summer.

United's pursuit of the 27-year-old stretches back to the World Cup finals, when Owen suffered a serious knee injury. Liverpool rivalled Newcastle for his signature in the summer of 2005,

but were not prepared to match the 16 million pound fee accepted by Real Madrid and it is understood that Rafael Benitez, the manager at Anfield, is ambivalent towards their former player.

Public discussion regarding the existence of a 9 million pound get-out clause infuriated Freddy Shepherd, the Newcastle chairman, who called upon Owen to commit himself to the club. That declaration has not followed, although Owen has never expressed any desire to leave Tyneside and used a recent column in The Times to confirm that he had enjoyed "a good chat" with Allardyce.

Glenn Roeder's replacement intends to transform the culture at Newcastle into a replica of the system he employed at Bolton Wanderers where emphasis was placed on psychology, sports science and innovations in diet and fitness and Owen has been impressed by his vision. In Mark Viduka and Joey Barton, there have already been two quality additions to the squad.

Owen's continued presence would also be a coup for Ashley, the billionaire businessman, who has assumed control at Newcastle. Ashley's ambitions are high and that task will be

assisted by Owen's marketing potential and talent for scoring goals. Since joining Newcastle two years ago, he has been limited to 13 starts for the club because of injury and has acknowledged that he has yet to provide value for money.

Martins could leave for 13 million pounds, 3 million pounds more than Roeder paid Inter Milan ten months ago. Juventus have been linked with the 22-year-old, who scored 17 goals in his first season at Newcastle, and Arsène Wenger's admiration for the Nigeria forward may be hardened if Thierry Henry leaves Arsenal; Martins this week spoke of his desire to stay on Tyneside.

If it is not dismantled, Allardyce's striking quartet of Owen, Martins, Viduka and Shola Ameobi should be formidable and he has taken steps to bolster the rearguard. Having missed out on Tal Ben Haim, who joined Chelsea on a free transfer, he is expected to sign David Rozehnal, 26, the Paris St-Germain defender, for about 3 million pounds and is also monitoring Sami Hyypia, of Liverpool, and Habib Beye, of Marseilles.

# Thaksin's funds to be probed

Football

AFP, Singapore

Thai officials will investigate the source of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's funds if he succeeds in buying Manchester City, Finance Minister Chalongphob Sussangkarn said here Sunday.

Chalongphob told journalists on the sidelines of an East Asian economic forum in Singapore that Thaksin, who already faces corruption charges in Bangkok, had declared no overseas assets when he was in power.

The minister said the funding for the 162.6 million-dollar bid for the English Premier League football club was a "mystery" to Thailand.

"I'm sure that the Assets Examination Committee will look at the source of his funds and will try

to see whether they are legal funds that were taken out, or other means ....," said the Thai minister.

He said, "it's difficult to trace all these movements" of funds by the former leader, a self-made billionaire who currently lives in London after being ousted by a military coup last September.

A powerful anti-graft panel has frozen 1.52 billion dollars of domestic funds belonging to Thaksin and his family as part of investigations. Chalongphob repeatedly maintained Sunday that the military-backed government does not interfere in the judicial system and said Thaksin would receive protection if he returned to face charges in Bangkok.

"If he comes back, they will have to provide protection for sure," said the minister, who was attending a meeting of government officials, corporate leaders and experts under the auspices of the World

Economic Forum.

If Thaksin is found guilty on criminal charges, he could be extradited to Thailand on the basis of bilateral agreements with some countries, Chalongphob added.

Manchester City accepted Thaksin's takeover bid in London Thursday, hours after Thai prosecutors laid formal criminal corruption charges against the former leader.

The formal bid for the Blues was made by Thaksin's UK Sports Investments company and backed by management at Manchester City.

Although Thaksin has won over the board, he must still gain the backing of other shareholders and pass a standard "fit and proper person" test. This is carried out by the Premier League, which runs the Premiership.

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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6 Actor  
11 Appetizer  
12 Inventor  
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15 Spurts  
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16 New  
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17 Assertion  
19 "Go,  
team!"  
20 Cribbage  
gizmos  
22 Diplo-  
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agl.  
23 Bear  
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24 Bert's  
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26 Egg  
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28 Apply  
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30 Mess  
up

**DOWN**  
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2 Pulver's  
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4 Cartel  
acronym  
5 Induction  
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23 Ringlets  
25 Corrode  
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32 Quantity  
33 Tackiness  
34 Bottom  
line  
36 Trite  
37 Seraglios  
38 Big  
pilt  
41 Subject  
44 Gull's  
cousin  
45 Hay-  
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50 D.C.  
title

**Solution time: 27 mins.**  
PEEPS BLT PAR  
TRAIT REA ORA  
AGREE EARLIER  
GORE LITZ NITIE  
PULP NERDS  
TRYING ADEUSE  
GOODY EASE  
OTHER EEC RAW  
CIAO ANDREW  
FARNEST RILDE  
ARB MIA NAON  
NAV SAL LUSTS

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	53						54		

**CRYPTOQUIP**  
AV W BYPRKL AR HWS EKK  
VKLC KV VPANWEYR WLC  
CYREPKSYPR, RKFY FANXE  
RWS AE'R HWPXRAB HKPRXAB.  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: WHAT MIGHT A  
PERSON CALL FOLKS WHO ARE SMOOTHING  
DOWN PIECES OF CORN? KERNEL SANDERS.  
Today's Cryptquip Clue: K equals O

## Holland retain Euro U-21 title

INTERNET, undated

Hosts Holland have won their second consecutive European Under-21 Championship, crushing Serbia 4-1.

The Jong Oranje had never won this tournament before 2006, yet made it two on the trot with a confident Final performance in Groningen against 10-man Serbia.

Beneath a thunderstorm it took 17 minutes for the Dutch to break through when Daniel de Ridder spooned a pass over the defence for Otman Bakkal to strike.

There was a scare as Aleksander Kolarov's cross wrong-footed goalkeeper Boy Waterman to thump the upright, but Serbia's fightback fizzled out in the space of three second half minutes.

First de Ridder set up a low Ryan Babel finish, then Kolarov saw red for a second bookable offence.

Holland ran riot with Maceo Rigters securing his top scorer status for the competition, going round the helpless goalkeeper for his fourth goal, and Luigi Bruins snatching a late taste of glory.

Serbia had still managed to get one back with Dragan Mrdjaj's header and goalkeeper Damir Kahriman denied a 71st-minute Babel penalty.

## Kanoute stays with Sevilla

INTERNET, undated

Striker Frederic Kanoute has dashed a number of Premier League clubs' hopes of signing him by pledging his future to Spanish side Sevilla.

Newcastle, Portsmouth and Bolton were all linked with the Mali international.

"I've got two years left on my contract and I'm not planning on moving," said Kanoute, 29, after he scored the goal that secured Sevilla the Spanish Cup.

Sevilla, who won the Uefa Cup earlier this season, beat Getafe 1-0, though Kanoute was sent off late in the game.

He was dismissed just before the final whistle for retaliating after being fouled.

Kanoute scored 21 league goals last season as Sevilla finished third to claim a Champions League place, but he had been reported to be pushing for a move back to England.

"I've read a lot of things that aren't true," said Kanoute, who played for West Ham and Tottenham, before he joined Sevilla in 2005.

"I've had two great seasons here and now we've won another trophy."

Kanoute's winner against Getafe means he has scored in all four of Sevilla's victories in cup finals over the past two seasons.

He found the net in the UEFA Cup final victories against Middlesbrough in 2006 and against Espanyol last month as well as in his side's 3-0 victory over Barcelona in the European Super Cup at the start of the season.

## Chakvetadze upsets Jankovic

AFP, S-Hertogenbosch

Russian third seed Anna Chakvetadze won the 130,000-euro WTA tournament here on Saturday, upsetting top seed Jelena Jankovic 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-3, in the final.

The players had to be patient as the first set was interrupted by rain four times. The 20-year-old Chakvetadze had led 5-0 but just managed to hang on to win the set on a tiebreak.

Serb Jankovic, playing with a bandage on her left thigh, hit back to win the second set 6-3 though, looking as though she was in pain on many occasions, she lost the final set by the same score and was not able to repeat her tournament success in Birmingham a week earlier.

For eighth world-ranked Chakvetadze, it was a second title this season, following her victory in Hobart at the beginning of the year, and her fourth title ever.

# The cream of the crop (II)

Renowned sports journalist and broadcaster **GABRIEL MARCOTTI** continues his countdown to pick out the fifty best footballers on the planet. In today's excerpt we look at numbers 35 through 21.

Football

35. **Fernando Torres (Atletico Madrid)**  
It feels as if he's been around forever, but he's still just twenty-three. Tall, strong, bright, he can lead any line on his own.
34. **David Beckham (Real Madrid/Los Angeles Galaxy)**  
Strip away the hype, and you have a respected leader who provides the most delicious service from wide positions. That alone is worth a few dozen goals a season.
33. **Javier Zanetti (Inter)**  
Again, we're dealing with intangibles here. The Inter skipper is a true leader, selfless and self-sacrificing, who can fill either full-back position or play in midfield. One of the most underrated players of the past decade.
32. **Jamie Carragher (Liverpool)**  
Like a fine wine, he gets better with

age. Reads the game exceptionally well and has developed a first-rate tactical awareness. Plus, he'd run through a brick wall for you.

31. **Florent Malouda (Lyons)**  
Put him wide or put him in a diamond and the result is the same: a blend of quality and workrate that make him one of the most sought-after players on the market today.

30. **John Terry (Chelsea)**  
He's what God had in mind when he invented the British centre half. While Terry's strength and courage win him plaudits, he is also an underrated distributor who reads the game very well.

29. **Andrea Pirlo (Milan)**  
Possibly the best free-kick taker of the lot. He single-handedly brought back the role of the deep-lying playmaker. He's the human metro-nome, the man who dictates his team's rhythm and hardly ever gives the ball away.

28. **Mahamadou Diarra (Real**

**Madrid)**  
He's a natural-made backbone to any side. Never stops running, wins every 50-50 and distributes the ball efficiently. A central defender's best friend.

27. **David Villa (Valencia)**  
Nobody in La Liga has scored more over the past two seasons. Quick, tricky and with an eye for goal, he will punish any opponent's error.

26. **Michael Ballack (Chelsea)**  
OK, so he had a bad season. But he's big, strong, outstanding in the air and can find the target from anywhere in the final third of the pitch.

25. **Dimitar Berbatov (Tottenham Hotspur)**  
He has the body of a bruiser and the touch of a virtuoso. And he looks like he'll only get better. One of the more athletic big men on this list.

24. **Andriy Shevchenko (Chelsea)**  
Like Ballack, he underachieved last year. But his contribution goes beyond goals (is it just a coincidence that Didier Drogba scored so much in

the one season he played alongside the Ukrainian?) and with an injury-free pre-season under his belt, he's worth taking a punt on.

23. **Ronaldo (Milan)**  
Put your fat jokes to one side please. Consider instead the seven goals in twelve starts for Milan after leaving the Bernabeu asylum. Or the 82 goals in 117 starts he notched at Real in the seasons before the move. Now wash your mouth out with soap.

22. **Didier Drogba (Chelsea)**  
The nice thing with him is that you can either leave him up on his own and lump balls to him or get him involved in the short-passing game. Either way, he'll tie up entire opposing back fours on his own.

21. **Carles Puyol (Barcelona)**  
A fine defender, but he ranks so high for the intangibles. Puyol is a natural-born leader, a manager's dream, a guy who knows his limits and will leave his innards on the pitch for the club.

# 'A Gunner for life'

Football

INTERNET, undated

Thierry Henry admits he will miss Arsenal and claims he will be a 'Gunner for life' despite his impending departure.

The London club's record goalscorer is on the brink of completing a reported 16 million pound move to Barcelona.

Henry is due in Catalonia to finalise terms today and is expected to be unveiled tomorrow, but he claims he leaves with a heavy heart.

'Arsenal will always be in my blood and in my heart and I will always remember you guys,' the 29-year-old told Arsenal TV.

'I said I was going to be a Gunner for life and I didn't lie because once you are a Gunner you will always a Gunner. The club is in my heart and will remain in my heart forever.

'I am going to miss everybody. It's going to be a huge miss. I will become now an Arsenal fan and look always for the result.

'I always gave 100%. I hope you appreciate what I did here. I appreciated what you did for me.'

Henry has cited the uncertainty over manager Arsene Wenger's future and the recent departure of former vice chairman David Dein as factors in his decision to head for Spain.

He added: 'I would like to thank

everybody I have been involved with at Arsenal, especially the boss and Mr Dein.'

Henry has been one of the greatest players to grace the English game and his record at Arsenal has been outstanding with 226 goals coming in 364 appearances.

The former Monaco player joined the club in the summer of 1999 after a disappointing spell at Juventus and game of age under the guidance of Wenger.

He won two Premier League titles, finished as the competition's top scorer on four occasions and collected the FA Cup three times.

He also appeared in last year's Champions League final when the Gunners were beaten by the club he is joining, Barcelona.

The Spanish club first attempted to sign the player last summer but Henry declined, choosing to sign a new four-year contract.

Since then, however, the change behind the scenes at the Emirates Stadium has unsettled the Frenchman.

He added: 'Before Mr Dein left, for whatever reason, I went to the boss and said 'I don't want to leave'.

'There had been a lot of speculation about me and I assured him that I

did not want to leave.

'But after Mr Dein left that unsettled the team and the boss. Especially as at the moment he has not committed himself to the club.

'He said he will see out his contract but you cannot be sure if he is going to go or stay (at the end of next season).

'Hopefully he is going to stay but I need to be certain and reassured of that. Everybody knows I am 30 [in August].

'The boss being unsettled, Mr Dein going, it did unsettle me a bit. After that I had thoughts of leaving the club.'



PHOTO: INTERNET

Russia's Anna Chakvetadze holds the trophy of the Ordina Open after she defeated Jelena Jankovic of Serbia in the final in Rosmalen, Netherlands on Saturday.