

Gunners out of reckoning: Drogba

AFP, London

Arsenal have no hope of challenging Manchester United and Chelsea next season for the English Premiership title after the sale of Thierry Henry. Didier Drogba said.

Arsenal sold Henry earlier in the week to Barcelona for 16 million pounds and now Ivory Coast forward Drogba says that has played into the hands of champions United and his own Chelsea team.

Speaking to the News of the World, Drogba said: "The exit of Henry to Barcelona is good news for us -- it means that there is one less rival in Chelsea's way.

"And Arsenal have a serious problem because Henry's absence is a very complicated issue to resolve.

"For us this one rare change means it will be Chelsea and United fighting for the Premiership again."

Drogba scored the winner in last season's FA Cup final victory over United but despite finishing as the league's top goalscorer, he could not lead his side to the title ahead of United.

With Henry injured for much of the season, Arsenal struggled and finished more than 20 points off the pace.

Drogba has since been linked with a move away from Stamford Bridge with European champions AC Milan reportedly interested in signing him.

"Milan? What a good club, they are the champions of Europe. But I have spoken to nobody," he said.

"I only know what I read in the press but there is no problem with my contract with Chelsea. My deal is clear and no bother to me."

Forlan to bolster Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Uruguay striker Diego Forlan is poised to sign for Atletico Madrid, his club Villarreal disclosed on Saturday.

"Villarreal and Atletico Madrid have reached an agreement on the transfer," Villarreal said on its official site without revealing the fee or length of the contract.

The deal follows reports that Atletico's Fernando Torres is likely to be heading to Liverpool after the Premiership side tabled a 27 million pound bid for the Spanish forward.

Forlan, who has 54 Spanish first division goals to his name, joined Villarreal in 2004 from Manchester United.



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich's Miroslav Klose (R) and Sao Paulo's Eric Leandro da Silva are in pursuit of the ball during their exhibition match in Hong Kong yesterday.

Klose hits the target

Football

AFP, Seoul

Germany marksman Miroslav Klose scored on debut as new-look Bayern Munich came from behind to beat Brazilian champions Sao Paulo 2-1 in the Reunification Cup on Sunday.

Klose headed an equaliser on 60 minutes before another new signing, Turkish midfielder Hamit Altintop, secured the deserved win with a deflected free-kick.

Bayern coach Ottmar Hitzfeld gave Klose, who moved from Werder Bremen for a reported 15 million euros (20 million dollars), 99 marks out of 100 for his performance.

"When a new signing scores in his first match it's very important for his morale and to deal with the pressure," Hitzfeld said.

"So having a successful debut will help him a lot."

Klose was the final piece of a 69-

million-euro rebuilding programme for the 20-time German champions, whose fourth-placed Bundesliga finish was their worst in more than a decade.

In a clash of styles on a sodden pitch, Brazilian flair broke the dead-lock on 19 minutes when Rafinha played a quick one-two and chipped the ball onto the chest of Marcel, who poked it past Bayern 'keeper Oliver Kahn.

Marcel had earlier tested Kahn with a curling free-kick and Bruno headed a corner over from close range.

Klose linked well with Germany team-mate Philipp Lahm for Bayern's best chance of the half but the defender fired straight at Sao Paulo 'keeper Bosco.

After the break, Klose cued up Andreas Ottl for a rasping long-range drive which was turned round the post before capping an impressive debut with his headed goal from a corner.

The lively Altintop settled matters

on 76 minutes when his driven free-kick bounced into the net off a Brazilian defender.

Sao Paulo coach Milton Cruz said because of league commitments, he had just 15 days to prepare for the match, forcing him to field mainly young players.

"It was good experience for them - they worked out well even though they had just two practices as a complete team," Cruz said.

Despite not qualifying for next season's Champions League, Bayern have also signed Italy's World Cup-winning striker Luca Toni and splashed out 25 million euros on French midfielder Franck Ribery, although neither travelled here.

The match was part of celebrations marking 10 years since Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule after 155 years under Britain. A combined China and Hong Kong team were playing a veteran FIFA World Stars side later.

Sevilla eye De Sanctis

INTERNET, undated

Spanish outfit Sevilla are increasingly determined to sign an Italian goalkeeper with Morgan De Sanctis the favourite ahead of Marco Amelia.

Udinese have repeatedly stated that they will not release Italian international De Sanctis, but the offers from overseas are growing.

Now it is reported that UEFA Cup holders Sevilla want to find a new shot-stopper in Serie A and have set their sights on De Sanctis.

There are also suggestions that his agent has received an offer from Betis as well, but that Sevilla lead the race.

If De Sanctis is confirmed as unavailable, then both Spanish sides will turn their attention towards Livorno's World Cup winner Amelia.

Although he never played in Germany 2006, he does have a winners' medal to his name and has also been linked with Lazio.

Becker slams British wildcards

AFP, London

Triple Wimbledon champion Boris Becker has hit out at the wild-card system used to give British players a chance of Grand Slam action.

Every year a handful of British men and women are given a free-ride straight into the first round draw at the All England Club, despite their world rankings being far too low to merit a place in the field.

And German Becker, who now works as a television commentator, says that it is pointless giving players in their 20s wildcards because if they need one by that age, they will never make it as a top level player.

"What strikes me is there are no good British teenagers appearing," he told BBC radio.

"The wild cards are given to people in their early 20s. That is the wrong signal.

"If you are not in the top 150 in the world by the time you are 23 or 24 you should look for another job."

Becker insists it is imperative to get more British youngsters playing the game.

He added: "You need to see them at 12, 14 and 16 years old. Then they have a higher chance of qualifying and actually winning the Wimbledon title."

Six-time Grand Slam champion Becker in 1985 became the youngest-ever winner of the men's singles title at Wimbledon at the age of 17.

Rossi roars to victory

AFP, Assen



Seven-time world champion Italian Valentino Rossi, riding a

Yamaha, made an incredible comeback to win the Dutch Grand Prix here on Saturday.

Rossi snatched victory 1.909-seconds ahead of championship leader Casey Stoner of Australia with American reigning champion Nicky Hayden third at 6.077 after 26 laps on the TT track.

It was a remarkable victory for Rossi who started 11th on the grid but had already risen to third with a quarter of the race run.

Stoner quickly passed pole-sitter and countryman Chris Vermeulen and he was soon followed by American John Hopkins.

Hopkins failed to exert much pressure on Stoner but that came

soon enough as a storming Rossi passed the American just before the halfway mark in the race.

The battle for victory raged with Rossi hounding Stoner until three laps from the end when he passed the 22-year-old on a long corner and comfortably eased away to reignite his championship bid.

"It's a great result. I didn't really expect to have such an achievement," said Rossi.

It was the sixth win at Assen for Rossi, having won four times in MotoGP, 2007, 2005, 2004, 2002, once in 250cc in 1998 and once in 125cc in 1997.

Stoner now leads Rossi by just 19 points at the top of the standings.

But Rossi's confidence is building at the half-way stage of the 18-leg world championship series.

"It's not a slim margin by any means against a rider of Casey's

calibre. But if we succeed in improving the motorcycle and above all the tyres, everything remains possible."

Rossi has room to work on the improvements he needs as the next round takes place in Sachsenring, Germany on July 17.

In the 250cc category, world champion Jorge Lorenzo of Spain achieved his sixth and perhaps easiest win of the season.

The Aprilia rider consolidated his championship lead by finishing comfortably ahead of San Marino's Alex De Angelis and Spaniard Alvaro Bautista.

Italian Mattia Pasini of Aprilia lead from start to finish to win the 125cc category, six days after winning his first race at Donington.

Second place was enough for Spaniard Hector Faubel of Aprilia to extend his world championship lead.

Spadea does the rap

Tennis

AFP, London

Rap may be more in tune with gun-toting gangsters than the tea-sipping members of the genteel All England Club, but American player Vince Spadea is doing his best to bridge the gap at Wimbledon.

Mobsters, guns and drugs it ain't, but outspoken part-time rapper Spadea -- motto "ain't afraid of ya" -- has been spewing out his rhymes around the grounds in his special "Wimbledon Rap".

The 32-year-old American

number five raps about Roger Federer, strawberries and cream, Anna Kournikova, eating scones, Prince William and even doing the laundry with Andre Agassi.

"For a start, it's pretty obvious I'm white. I didn't grow up in the 'hood. I don't claim I have an urban influence," the world number 64 told Britain's The Sun newspaper.

"Sometimes I'll rap to other players but I don't ram it down their throats. I did a rap on Andy Roddick at the Olympics."

Spadea was knocked out of the men's singles first round by Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic, the 15th seed, but he is still in competition playing mixed doubles with com-

patriot Vania King.

Spadea hopes to record an album in future.

"I want to do my best to achieve respect and do something I'm proud of. I don't want to do something pop-ish. I don't want to sell out," he said.

"I've had offers to do stuff in New York and, in a few weeks, I'll do some tracks to be downloaded off the Internet."

The journeyman pro leads a busy lifestyle.

His book "Break Point: The Secret Diary of a Pro Tennis Player" upset some of his fellow players with its tales of chasing women while on the tour and hanging out with models.

Euro 2012 to fetch a billion thru' TV

Football

AFP, Kiev

The rights to broadcast the Euro 2012 football championships are going to be sold for one billion euros, Adam Olkowicz, head of the Polish committee for organizing the championships, said Saturday in Yalta.

"Only the TV broadcasting rights to Euro 2012 will be sold for one billion euros, which will be a record. Big earnings are expected for UEFA. The countries organizing the championships will also get a big economic gain," he said during the round table 'Euro 2012: what it will

bring to Ukraine'.

This round table was part of the fourth annual summit of Yalta European Strategy (YES), a Ukrainian-European high-level informal forum, founded by Victor Pinchuk, a Ukrainian tycoon who owns a number of large, mostly metallurgical enterprises.

According to Olkowich, the main problem for the successful organization of Euro 2012 is time. "Five years -- are not quite enough," he said, as quoted by the Victor Pinchuk Foundation press service.

At the same time Vitali Klitschko, an adviser to the Ukrainian President and a former heavyweight boxing champion of

the world, believes that the hosting of Euro 2012 will help to develop the Ukraine's economy.

"Holding the championships will bring new standards of quality -- quality of the products, quality of the manning support," he said.

Klitschko also hopes that the Euro 2012 championship will help to unite eastern and western parts of Ukraine.

"The championship will become the event that could really unite the country," he said according to the press service.

Poland and Ukraine were chosen in a shock vote by European football's governing body UEFA, to jointly host the Euro 2012 championships.