

## Milan to make Eto'o offer

AFP, Madrid

European champions AC Milan are to make a bid for Barcelona's Cameroun international striker Samuel Eto'o, Marca sports daily reported on Tuesday.

"A Milan emissary is due to go to Barca's Nou Camp offices in the next few days with a cheque in his hand," Marca indicated, adding the offer could resolve Barca's headache of how to play Eto'o alongside new signing Thierry Henry in an attack also containing Leo Messi and Ronaldinho.

Milan have been pondering a raid on Barca over the summer, with club administrator delegate Adriano Galliani trying to arrange the signing of Ronaldinho in a swap deal for fellow Brazilian Kaka.

With Kaka, also a Real Madrid target, staying put, Eto'o is now top of the list of desired new names for the "rossoneri".

Galliani is on record as saying that the Italians are determined to land a "great champion" and named his top five as Eto'o, Ronaldinho, Chelsea's Didier Drogba and his clubmate and former Milan star Andrei Shevchenko, as well as Alexandre Pato of Brazilian side Porto Alegre.

Barcelona chairman Joan Laporta insisted on June 19 that Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard, Ronaldinho and Eto'o, who together landed the 2006 Champions League, would stay with the Catalan club despite a barren season and then the arrival of Henry from Arsenal.

Former Barca coach Johan Cruyff said earlier this month he believed there was no room for Henry, Eto'o, Ronaldinho and Messi on the pitch at the same time.

## Rusty Keifer progresses

AFP, Los Angeles

Germany's Nicolas Kiefer, shaking off the rust from not playing hardcourt tennis for over a year, defeated Telmuraz Gabashvili 6-3, 6-3 in the first round of the Los Angeles ATP event on Monday.

Kiefer, a wildcard entry into Los Angeles, said beating the Russian on the main stadium at the UCLA tennis facility will boost his confidence as he tries to get his world ranking back to a respectable number.

"On the first hardcourt match for a long time, the most important thing is to win. It doesn't matter how you do it, you just have to fight," said the 409th ranked Kiefer.

Taking the court after Kiefer in the night match was Russian third seed Marat Safin who beat Australian Chris Guccione 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/1) to reach the second round.

Kiefer needed just one hour, six minutes to dispatch the 22-year-old Gabashvili who is ranked 95th in the world.

Kiefer advances to the second round where he will face either David Nalbandian or Igor Kunitsyn.

Kiefer has more aces (7-3) than Gabashvili and less double faults (1-3) and won 89 percent of his first serve points.

Kiefer, who turned 30 earlier this month, has never won in Los Angeles but he has played well in the past. He lost in the 2004 final to countryman Tommy Haas.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo (L) skips past the tackle of Urawa Reds midfielder Hideki Uchidate during their friendly match at the Saitama stadium on Tuesday

## Ono denies United

Football

AFP, Saitama

Shinji Ono denied Manchester United victory in the first game of their Asian tour with a late equaliser to secure a 2-2 draw for Urawa Red Diamonds in Saitama on Tuesday.

Second half strikes by Darren Fletcher and Cristiano Ronaldo had cancelled out Hideki Uchidate's opener to put United ahead, but Japan midfielder Ono's 77th minute goal proved enough to seal a share of the spoils.

United, who had arrived in

Tokyo less than 36 hours earlier, appeared off the pace in the early stages as J-League champions Urawa attempted to carve out an opener.

But with Portuguese winger Ronaldo in the starting line-up, United carried threat going forward and the Premiership's Footballer of the Year almost created an opening in nine minutes before a hard but fair challenge on the edge of the penalty area by Urawa defender Nene.

The home side went closest to scoring early on, though, when Takahito Some forced Edwin Van der Sar into an important save low

down to his right at the near post.

Uchidate then teed up Brazilian striker Ponte to shoot over the crossbar from 20 yards before United finally worried the home side with a long range effort from England midfielder Michael Carrick that flew narrowly over the bar.

That near miss appeared to give a clearly tired United the lift they needed and it required a crucial save by Ryota Tsuzuki on 24 minutes to keep out Ronaldo's fiercely struck shot from the edge of the penalty area.

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## 'Follow Park's example'

Football

AFP, Tokyo

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has refused to rule out adding more Asian stars to his Old Trafford squad -- if they follow the same route taken by South Korean midfielder Park Ji-Sung.

Ferguson, currently in Tokyo with United on the first-leg of their Asian tour, is due to take his team to Seoul on Wednesday for a friendly against FC Seoul in the South Korean capital on Friday.

Park will miss the game due to a knee injury that is set to keep him on the sidelines until January, but the popular midfielder has already

made a big impact at United since arriving from PSV Eindhoven two years ago.

Few Asians have made a real impact in the Premiership, with Japanese duo Junichi Inamoto and Hidetoshi Nakata struggling to reproduce their international form during their time in England.

Aside from Park, only Chinese defender Sun Jihai at Manchester City can claim to have exceeded expectations in the most high-profile league in the world, although South Korea's Lee Young-Pyo and Seol Ki-Hyeon are starting to make a mark at Spurs and Reading respectively.

Ferguson admits that he would certainly sign more Asian players if they can prove themselves in

Europe before heading to United.

"It's possible that I could sign more Asian players, but it's hard to judge them while they are playing in their domestic leagues," he said.

"Park came to us from PSV in Holland, so he had already proved himself in a high quality and competitive European league before arriving at United.

"That is what Asian players need to do.

"From our point of view at United, we need to see if they are capable of playing for a club of our size, but Ji-Sung showed that during his time at PSV."

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## Roma close in on Giuly

AFP, Rome

Roma are on the verge of signing Barcelona's French forward Ludovic Giuly, according to Italian media reports on Tuesday.

The Gazzetta dello Sport said the 31-year-old France international flew into the Italian capital on Monday and has agreed terms on a three-year contract with the Serie A club.

Reports suggest the fee will be around five million euros.

Giuly came through the Lyon set-up as a teenager before moving to French first division rivals Monaco in 1998.

He left Monaco to join Barcelona following the French club's defeat to FC Porto in the 2004 Champions League final.

Giuly eventually won a Champions League winners medal two years later when the Spanish giants won the 2006 final against Arsenal.

He was overlooked for the French squad which reached last year's World Cup final in Germany, which they lost to Italy after a penalty shoot-out.

## Inter draft in S American duo

INTERNET, undated

Inter Milan have drafted in Lazio playmaker Luis Jimenez and River Plate's Colombian defender Nelson Rivas.

The two players arrived at Inter's mountain training base in northern Italy late on Monday and took part in training on Tuesday, Inter's Web site (www.inter.it) said, without giving details of the transfers.

Chilean Jimenez has moved to the San Siro after falling out with Lazio bosses.

The 23-year-old likes to play in the hole behind the striker and was a leading light for the Rome club last season as they secured a Champions League berth despite tough financial constraints.

Inter's strikers were sometimes isolated from the defence-minded central midfielders last season and Jimenez's arrival could help coach Roberto Mancini to solve the problem.

## Beckham trains alone

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham suited up Monday but chose to work out alone during his first training session with the Los Angeles Galaxy as he rehabs a sore ankle.

The 32-year-old former England captain was limited to light exercises and ball work with the injury originally sustained on England duty back in June continuing to bother him.

Beckham is still hoping to be able to make his Major League Soccer debut in Saturday's friendly against English Premier League giant Chelsea, but his new employers will not want to risk their multi-million dollar signing in an exhibition game unless they are sure he is healthy enough to play.

Beckham was officially unveiled as a Galaxy player on Friday as he begins a five-year contract with Los Angeles.

## Mirza breezes past Spears

AFP, Cincinnati

India's Sania Mirza breezed to a 6-4, 6-3 win over American Abigail Spears in the opening round Monday of the 175,000 dollar WTA event.

The No. 3 seed dominated the unseeded Spears in the service game, winning 69 percent (22-of-32) of her first serve points.

The world No. 38 is on the same end of the bracket as top-seeded Russian Anna Chakvetadze, but would not face former champion Patty Schnyder until the final.

After falling in the semi-finals a year ago, Schnyder will look to reclaim the title when she opens against Australia's Monique Adamczak.

The second seed from Switzerland, Schnyder won the hardcourt tournament in 2005 for her 10th and most recent singles title.

Last year, she lost to Slovakia's Katarina Srebotnik, who finished as the runner-up to Russia's Vera Zvonareva. Both Srebotnik and Zvonareva are not entered in this year's event.

Schnyder enters this tournament having won 15 of her previous 19 matches, including wins over Martina Hingis and Serena Williams.

The 28-year-old also reached the round of 16 at both the French Open and Wimbledon.

Chakvetadze, currently No. 8 in the world, is the top seed and opens against Tatiana Poutchek of Belarus on Tuesday.

The 20-year-old will be looking for her third title of the season. Seventh-seeded Akiko Morigami fought her way past France's Camille Pin, 4-6, 7-6 (8-6), 7-6 (7-2), and American Lila Osterloh took down Ukraine's Viktoriya Kutuzova, 6-2, 6-3, in other Monday action.

## Mourinho lauds Drogba

Football

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has underlined the importance of star striker Didier Drogba to the club's plans for next season.

According to a report in a UK national newspaper this morning, the Ivory Coast international has not ruled out leaving the Blues this summer - but Mourinho clearly has no plans to let the player go.

He said: "You know Drogba has always been important since he arrived."

"Even in his first season when he was not scoring a lot of goals, his contribution as a team player was massive."

"So when we remember he was

the top scorer in the country and one of the best players in the Champions League (last season) and when I see him in training and he looks so sharp and with only one week of work, his quality looks even better than last season."

"I think we will have the same Didier we had last season and that for us is fantastic because as a striker and a team player it's difficult to find better."

Mourinho has revealed he will take no chances over Ashley Cole's return to the Chelsea side following the news Wayne Bridge is set to be ruled out for up to three months.

The Chelsea boss last week claimed Cole would resume training during the Blues' pre-season tour in America following ankle surgery but with Bridge now sidelined for a lengthy period due to a hip operation, he will adopt a more cautious

approach towards his first-choice left-back.

"With Ashley Cole, he's the only left-back we have so we have to take care of him," Mourinho said.

"He'll be back only in very, very safe conditions."

"Normally, he will go into the team next week when we go back to London and hopefully he'll start the season in the match against Manchester United for the Charity Shield."

Meanwhile, the Chelsea boss will continue to mix and match his squad in the second game of their US tour against Suwon Bluewings in Los Angeles tonight.

Chelsea opened their pre-season campaign in northern California on Saturday night with a

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## Heat on for Iran, China

AFP, Kuala Lumpur



Iran will seek to pile more misery on Malaysia while China will be wary of a banana skin in the form of Uzbekistan in Group C's judgement day on Wednesday.

Anything other than an Iran win is unthinkable but the triple-champions may need a big victory against the abject co-hosts, who have already shipped 10 goals in two matches.

Finishing first is seen as vital with the top team staying here for the quarter and semifinals, while the runner-up faces trips to Indonesia, Vietnam and back to

Indonesia and a potential last-four clash with Japan or Australia.

"Our first priority is to stay in Malaysia, no matter who our opponents are in the quarterfinals," said Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei.

With the top three separated only by a point, China can still win and top the group but defeat would mean an early exit and probably the sack for coach Zhu Guanghu.

China impressed in their 5-1 rout of Malaysia but squandered a two-goal lead in the 2-2 draw with Iran. Uzbekistan, ranked nearly 30 spots higher, also beat the home team 5-0.

China will also be hampered by the loss of suspended captain Zheng Zhi and defender Li Weifeng, while Zheng Bin, Zhou Haibin and goalkeeper Li Leilei will

take late fitness tests.

"The absence of Zheng Zhi and Li Weifeng will definitely affect our team," admitted Energie Cottbus midfielder Shao Jiayi.

"They've been very important for us in the last two matches, especially Zheng Zhi. But we've been improving match by match and I'm sure we'll get a good result on Wednesday."

Uzbekistan coach Rauf Ilmolev predicted China would shrug off the loss of Zheng and Li and promised a very different performance to their 3-1 friendly defeat in March.

"Losing those two players is not a big problem for China -- they have players who can play instead of them," said Ilmolev, who has

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PHOTO: AFP

New Getafe coach Michael Laudrup (R) signs autographs during his presentation at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez in Getafe on Tuesday.

## Gunners confident on Wenger

AFP, London



Arsenal are confident that coach Arsene Wenger will stay at the Emirates Stadium with chairman Peter Hill-Wood revealing on Monday that talks over a new contract for the Frenchman have opened.

Wenger's current contract expires at the end of the forthcoming campaign, but Hill-Wood told the club's official website that he is confident the manager will sign up.

"I very much hope he will (sign). It's very important," the chairman told www.arsenal.com.

"He's done a marvellous job for

the last 10 years or so. He looks pretty fit to me and I think he enjoys himself still. He's got a good job and I'm hoping he'll stay with us."

"We had a fairly lengthy conversation recently and that went very well. Hopefully, in the not too distant future we'll have something positive to say about it. I'm confident he'll stay."

Hill-Wood also dismissed talk of a summer of discontent at Arsenal.

Wenger's side have been hit by the departure of captain Thierry Henry for Barcelona, while the futures of Wenger and midfielder Cesc Fabregas have also been the subject of persistent speculation, although the Spaniard committed his future to the club over the weekend.

With Croatia's Brazilian-born striker Eduardo da Silva, full-back Bacary Sagna and goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski the only new arrivals so far, Arsenal's ability to keep pace with their big-spending rivals has been called into question.

"I believe we've never been in a better position," said Hill-Wood.

"I think the team is absolutely first class. We had some very good results last year against the likes of Manchester United and Chelsea, the sides we didn't overhaul in the league but played pretty well against when we faced them."

"It's a young side still but they're a year older now so they're going to be that much better."

"If you tune in to the media, you

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## Toni worry for Bayern

AFP, Munich



Bayern Munich striker Luca Toni is sidelined for the next ten days and the Italian World Cup winner's knee injury is a concern for coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, the club revealed on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old will miss the German giant's League Cup opener against Werder Bremen in Dusseldorf this Saturday after picking up a knee injury at the weekend, but the minor setback concerns Hitzfeld.

Toni, who joined Bayern from

Italian side Fiorentina for 11 million euros in the summer, was injured early in Sunday's friendly win over minnows FC Albstadt.

An MRI scan has revealed only a slight tear to a knee tendon, so Toni is spared a long lay-off and Hitzfeld hopes he will be fit for his side's DFB German Cup first round tie against Wacker Burghausen on August 6 and their opening Bundesliga clash with newly-promoted Hansa Rostock five days later.

"I hope he can train again as quickly as possible," said a worried Hitzfeld.

"But whether it means he will be ready for the start of this season is doubtful, because he has already had problems with a leg injury while at Fiorentina."

Even though Toni's injury is not as

serious as first thought, "it's still a setback for us" insisted Hitzfeld.

With German internationals Lukas Podolski (knee) and Jan Schlaudraff (slipped disc) both recovering from surgery, as well as Roque Santa Cruz, on holiday after the Copa America, Bayern have summer signing Miroslav Klose as their only fit striker.

However, Bayern manager Uli Hoeness is looking forward to seeing Toni and Klose - which cost Bayern 23 million euros - pair up in attack - injury permitting.

"With Luca and Miro we have a dream attack," Hoeness told German agency SID.

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PHOTO: AFP

Real Betis' main shareholder Manuel Ruiz de Lopera (L) and club President Jose Leon (R) shake hands during the presentation of new coach, Argentinian Hector Cuper at a press conference in Ruiz de Lopera stadium on Monday.