

Charlton sell stars

AFP, London

Relegated Charlton lost two of their international stars on Friday as Danish striker Dennis Rommedahl was sold to Ajax Amsterdam and defender Luke Young was set to move to Middlesbrough.

The 28-year-old Rommedahl, who had played in the English Premiership since 2004 having spent seven seasons with PSV Eindhoven, was sold to Ajax for 680,000 pounds.

Boro have negotiated a price of 2.5million pounds for 28-year-old Young.

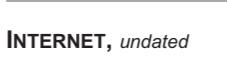
Young, who can play at centre-half or left-back, joined the Addicks for four million pounds in 2000, but has been given permission by manager Alan Pardew to pursue his hopes of a return to the top flight following Charlton's relegation.

"Ajax fits me perfectly. I hope that Ajax think the same," said Rommedahl.



FRANCESCO TOTTI

Donadoni accepts Totti's decision



INTERNET, undated

Italy coach Roberto Donadoni has broken his silence on Francesco Totti's decision to retire from international football.

"Francesco spoke the truth and is a loyal and honest person," said the Azzurri boss after Friday's announcement.

"Only those who wanted to spread vicious gossip said otherwise. We discussed the matter in depth and I was kept up to date with his decision."

Initially Totti had said he would return to the squad when he had fully recovered from the fractured ankle

he sustained in February 2006.

After a year-long hiatus, in which he won the Capocannoniere and Golden Shoe titles with 26 Serie A goals, the Roma man confirmed he'd play "the important games" against France and Ukraine in September.

However, the FIGC complained and insisted that there could be no part-time Italian internationals, so on Friday he officially hung up his Azzurri boots.

"Some may say I didn't do enough to keep him, but that's all pub talk," continued Donadoni.

"I am disappointed not to have him in my team, as he is one of the best players in Italy. But I respect his choice, which was both professional and human. He pondered this long and hard, realising how important it was."

Mr Wilson added: "Tiger said 'I'm very sorry ma'am'. When he left I shouted 'have a good next shot and get a birdie'.

"My wife did him a favour, she headed it back in for him."

'Bayern are favourites'

AFP, Berlin

Armin Veh, the coach of reigning Bundesliga champions VfB Stuttgart, insisted on Saturday Bayern Munich must start the new season as favourites after their multi-million summer signings.

Having spent a reported 69 million euros (95 million dollars) by recruiting the likes of Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni, German striker Miroslav Klose and French midfielder Franck Ribery, Veh says Bayern must be favourites for the German title. "Bayern have strengthened their squad with some big names, so for that reason, I'd make them favourites," said Veh, whose side have just finished their pre-season training camp in Austria.

"(Werder) Bremen and Schalke will also be up there, but we have only lost (goalkeeper) Timo Hildebrand and we have strengthened our squad, so I'm convinced we'll play a vital role again this season."

And Veh also admitted Stuttgart are hoping to sign 21-year-old Romanian striker Ciprian Marica, who has also been linked to Manchester City, from Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk.

"It's no secret that we would like to sign Ciprian Marica," admitted Veh.

"Even if that doesn't work out, we are prepared and have other candidates in mind."

Meanwhile, Stuttgart's opening Bundesliga game of the new season against last season's runner-up Schalke 04 at the 58,000 capacity Gottlieb-Daimler-Stadion on August 10 is already completely sold out.

Fowler joins Cardiff

AFP, London

Former England striker Robbie Fowler has agreed to join Championship side Cardiff on a two-year deal.

Fowler, who scored 183 goals in 369 games during his two spells with Liverpool and has 26 England caps, was released by his hometown club at the end of the Premier League season.

A statement on Cardiff's official website, www.cardiffcityfc.co.uk, said: "Cardiff City are delighted to announce that Robbie Fowler has agreed to join them on a two-year contract."

"Robbie is expected to be unveiled at a press conference in Cardiff on Monday or Tuesday this week."

Cardiff will stay in Spain next season.

Iran eye edge over Korea

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

We have to concentrate on defence to counter the pace of the Koreans."

Ghalehnoei said his side has an advantage over the Koreans having played all three of their previous games at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium here.

"By winning the group, we improved our team spirit and we also won the right to stay here for the knockout stage," he said.

"We have been here now for over two weeks so we are familiar with the environment, the climate and all of the facilities."

Iran, who won a hat-trick of Asian Cups from 1968-1976 but are seeking their first Asian Cup title in 31 years after beating Bahrain 4-2 in the third place playoff at the 2004 tournament in China.

Should Iran get past the Koreans they have the incentive of a likely semifinal here against Iraq, who they last beat 1-0 in the group phase of the 2000 Asian Cup in Lebanon.

South Korea's Dutch coach Pim Verbeek says challenges don't come bigger for his team than beating Iran.

"Since our arrival here most people we have talked to have said that Iran are one of the strongest teams and they are one of the favourites to win the Asian Cup," Verbeek said Saturday.

"I think that they're right because

they are an experienced team, they have a lot of foreign-based players and so far they've played well."

"I don't think the challenges come much bigger than Iran. We played well against Indonesia but we have to play even better tomorrow to go through to the next round."

But Verbeek believes the strong team ethic will help to carry them through.

"I think if you look at the quality of the players, their experience and the way that they have played so far, than I can only say that Iran probably have better players than us."

"But although we may not have better players, we have a very strong team and I think we will win the game tomorrow."

The Koreans have some insight into the Iranian team set-up through their Iranian-American assistant coach Afshin Ghotbi, who has an in-depth knowledge of Iranian football.

"Afshin knows everything about Iranian football and in big games like this, it's good to know everything about the opponent, about their system and the strengths and weaknesses of individual players," Verbeek said.

"I think it's definitely an advantage to have him with us."

Hamilton survives crash

INTERNET, undated

Lewis Hamilton escaped a horror 150mph crash in qualifying for the European Grand Prix.

The Brit sensation hurtled into a tyre barrier at the Nurburgring in Germany after his McLaren suffered a puncture.

Hamilton, 22, was quickly carried into the back of an ambulance on a stretcher with his neck in a precautionary brace, while he was also put on a drip.

McLaren boss Ron Dennis said: "Lewis is fine. There are no injuries, no broken bones."

"He doesn't have any pain and he did not lose consciousness."

"They're just keeping him for observation. But we won't be able to decide if he can race for a couple of hours."

"We had a problem with the wheel gun - we knew that."

The championship leader careered across a gravel trap in the final 15-minute qualifying session after his front-right suspension failed. That caused a puncture and he lost control at around 150mph.

Hamilton was able to indicate he was okay as he waved his right arm and gave a 'thumbs-up' sign.

Kimi Raikkonen is on pole position in the Ferrari, with Hamilton's teammate Alonso in second place.

Pienaar joins Everton

AFP, Liverpool

Everton made their second signing of the summer on Friday when they captured South Africa midfielder Steven Pienaar on a 12-month loan deal from Borussia Dortmund.

The 25-year-old made 25 appearances for the Bundesliga side after joining from Ajax in 2006 where he was seen as a replacement for Tomas Rosicky who left for Arsenal.

Pienaar follows midfielder Phil Jagielka as a Goodison Park newboy but the deal is subject to him being granted a work permit.

Everton, who will play in the UEFA Cup this season, spent four million pounds to bring Jagielka to Merseyside from Sheffield United, but the club insist they will not be dragged into paying inflated fees for players.