



PHOTO: AFP

Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard leaps high in the air to catch the ball during the Premiership football match against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane in London on Tuesday.

Cassano joins Sampdoria

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's troubled Italian international striker Antonio Cassano was sent on loan to Serie A outfit Sampdoria on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old has not enjoyed a successful time at Real and had several run-ins with the authorities at the club since moving from AS Roma in January 2006 for five million euros (6.9 million US dollars).

He was briefly suspended in October 2006 following a bust-up with then Real coach Fabio Capello and has had trouble keeping his weight down.

"Real Madrid can announce they have agreed that Antonio Cassano will play the coming season at Sampdoria on loan," read a statement from the Spanish champions.

"At the end of the season, the Italian club has the right to buy him if they should so wish."

Cassano was overlooked by Marcello Lippi for Italy's World Cup squad last year, but earned a recall under his successor Roberto Donadoni.

Cassano scored on his Italy debut against Poland in November 2003 and played for the Azzurri at the 2004 European championships in Portugal where they went out in the first round group stage.

Cocu's Arab adventure

AFP, The Hague

Former Dutch international midfielder Phillip Cocu has signed a one-year deal with United Arab Emirates club Al-Jazeera.

The 36-year-old, who has 101 caps for the national side, did not extend his contract with Dutch side PSV Eindhoven at the end of last season.

He joined his new team this week during a training camp in Munich, Germany.

The versatile former AZ Alkmaar (1988-1990), Vitesse Arnhem (1990-1995) and Barcelona (1998-2004) midfielder who can also play in defence, will be the only foreign player at Al-Jazeera.

He rejoined PSV in 2004 after playing for the club for three years between 1995 and 1998.

Cocu won five Dutch league titles during his career and one in Spain.

Carragher won't change mind

AFP, London

England boss Steve McClaren confirmed Wednesday that he has failed to convince Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher to return to international football.

Carragher, 29, announced his retirement last month after expressing his frustration at his place in the national pecking order following his omission from England's last game, a Euro 2008 qualifier in Estonia.

McClaren had been keen to keep Carragher involved, with defenders John Terry, Ledley King and Jonathan Woodgate all expected to miss the friendly against Germany at Wembley on August 22.

The England boss made a personal visit to Liverpool's training ground on Monday for a meeting

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Tottenham slump to second defeat

AFP, London



Everton beat Tottenham Hotspur 3-1 at White Hart Lane on Tuesday as the hosts slumped to their second straight defeat of the English Premier League season.

All the goals came in the first half as the Toffees kept up their perfect start to their campaign.

Everton defender Joleon Lescott headed in the opener after three minutes and though Spurs defender Anthony Gardner headed an equaliser on 26 minutes, the Toffees struck twice more.

Man-of-the-match Leon Osman struck in the 37th minute and veteran centre-half Alan Stubbs drilled in a free kick just before half time to kill off Tottenham.

Much was expected from Spurs this season under boss Martin Jol as Tottenham look to break the stranglehold of the big four: Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Spurs' north London rivals Arsenal.

But they flopped on their first home league performance of the season in a match that left Everton at the top of the table with six points ahead of Wednesday's matches - and Spurs rock-bottom.

Tottenham and Everton finished fifth and sixth in the top flight last season, earning UEFA Cup places.

Tottenham made one change from the side that lost 1-0 at newly

promoted Championship winners Sunderland in the Premier League's opening match on Saturday.

England striker Darren Bent, Spurs' big new signing, replaced Teemu Tainio, meaning Bent, Dimitar Berbatov and Robbie Keane were in the attack.

Everton stuck with the team that beat visitors Wigan Athletic 2-1 at Goodison Park on Saturday.

Much has been made of Tottenham's wealth of strikers, with England's Jermain Defoe starting on the bench.

But it was Everton who were straight on the attack and scored in the third minute.

Paul Stalteri fouled Mikel Arteta on the right and the Spanish midfielder took the free kick himself. Poor marking by Spurs meant Lescott was free to head in from five yards out.

Spurs thought they had equalised seven minutes later when Keane played Berbatov through and Bent swept his cross into the net, but it was correctly ruled out for offside.

But the equaliser did come in the 26th minute from fifth-choice centre-half Gardner, who was one of the defenders at fault for the Toffees' opener.

Tony Hibbert blocked Steed Malbranque's cross, handing Spurs a corner from the left.

Jermaine Jenas took the set piece and found Gardner, who lost his marker to head the ball down into the turf, the bounce beating Everton's USA goalkeeper Tim

Howard.

However, Everton restored their lead 11 minutes later.

Victor Anichebe laid the ball off for Arteta, who crossed in from the right. Ricardo Rocha, on for the injured Spurs defender Younes Kaboul beat Anichebe to it at the far post, but the ball dropped for midfielder Osman who drilled in a toe-poked shot.

Arteta served notice of Everton's capabilities from free kicks two minutes from half time when he fired one just over England goalkeeper Paul Robinson's bar.

And when Anichebe won a free kick 30 yards out in first half stoppage time, Stubbs blasted it low and a deflection off Didier Zokora's right boot was enough to take it past Robinson.

Jol had seen enough with half an hour to go and brought on Defoe for Bent, with England manager Steve McClaren, deprived of injured striker Wayne Rooney, watching from the stands.

Howard pulled off an excellent save to deny Defoe at the far post with 13 minutes to go.

But the substitution was too little, too late for Spurs.

Robinson made an excellent save in injury time to stop Everton striker Andry Johnson from making the score line worse for Tottenham.

Brazil to play US friendly

AFP, Chicago

Brazil's top-ranked football squad will play the United States here on September 9 in a clash of champions from North and South America after a US squad friendly at Mexico the same day was scrubbed.

Brazil, preparing for October's start of World Cup qualifying, will feature two-time FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldinho, a midfielder for Barcelona, as well as Real Madrid striker Robinho and stellar set-up man Kaka of AC Milan.

The Brazilians lead the all-time series against the US team 11-1, the lone American triumph coming during the 1998 Gold Cup. Brazil beat the host US team 2-1 in the 2003 Gold Cup semi-finals.

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Chelsea deny Alves deal

AFP, London

Chelsea have denied reports that they have reached an agreement with Sevilla of Spain for the transfer of Brazilian defender Daniel Alves.

The club have, however, have confirmed they are interested in signing the fullback.

Reports in Spain had suggested Alves was on the brink of completing a move and that the clubs had reached an agreement over a 36 million euros switch to Stamford Bridge.

Alves, who insists he wants to join Chelsea, was left out of Sevilla's

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Cech doesn't fear Reading

AFP, London



Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech does not fear returning on Wednesday to Reading's Madejski Stadium for the first time since suffering a horrific head injury there, said Blues boss Jose Mourinho.

The Czech Republic keeper has recovered from the grisly collision with Royals defender Stephen Hunt in October that fractured his skull. But he still wears protective headgear on match days - something sure to remind him of his shocking injury when Chelsea play at the Madejski in the second round of English Premier League matches.

Hunt has already said he will not be offering Cech any words of comfort when the pair meet again.

The two have not spoken since the accident but Mourinho believes Cech will take the game in his stride.

Asked if he thought the 25-year-old would be affected by his return to the stadium, Chelsea manager Mourinho replied: "I don't think so. It's just a game, a difficult one, but nothing else."

The Blues boss officially welcomed new signing Alex to the club on Tuesday but said the Brazil defender would require a further two weeks of intensive training before being considered.

Alex, 25, spent three years with PSV Eindhoven in the Netherlands

but Chelsea always had the first option to buy him.

The player was granted a work permit a fortnight ago and only restarted training in the last few days.

"He dominates in the air and has the physique to adapt to the English way of playing. Maybe one of the reasons we lost the championship last season was because we did not have a lot of defenders," Mourinho said.

"We lost Robert Huth and William Gallas in pre-season and John Terry was out for three months. Khalid Boulahrouz and Ricardo Carvalho were also out injured and we did not really have any solutions.

"I was scared whenever any of my central defenders went into a challenge and it was not a good situation for us just to have Carvalho and Terry.

"Now there is no reason to be scared like we were last season because we have Terry, Carvalho, Tal Ben Haim and Alex."

Mourinho also believes competition for places among his defensive quartet will be something Alex will relish.

"He plays in the most famous national team in the history of football and if he can cope with the challenge of that, he can cope with it at Chelsea," Mourinho said.

"It is competitive in the Brazil squad and in Chelsea it is the same."

Alex said he was delighted to have finally made it to Stamford Bridge.

Football

AFP, Toulouse

Liverpool coach Rafael Benitez tried to dampen down the expectation-surrounding striker Fernando Torres on Tuesday by refusing to set his 26-million-pound Spanish international a goal target. Speaking ahead of Liverpool's Champions League third qualifying round first leg clash at Toulouse, Benitez praised his star buy but also tried to ease the pressure on the former Atletico Madrid man.

"He did the talking for himself the other day (Saturday) on the pitch, playing well, working hard," said Benitez. "You could see the things we were looking for: pace, quality, work-rate and good team spirit.

"After the game he said he was happy, comfortable and expecting something more difficult but he was happy with his role.

"But it's not just about one game, we need to see him after two or three to see if he can manage properly with a lot of defenders, in games at home also, with our supporters, the other teams playing deep and compact. But we'll see, for now he's happy."

Pressed on what target he was setting the 23-year-old, Benitez would not be drawn on committing to a figure.

"I can't say I wish for a number of goals from him. I feel it's important for me and for him if the team can

win and you can see goals from all around the pitch, wingers, strikers or midfielders.

"I was really pleased with (Dirk) Kuyt last season; he didn't score 20 goals but was a fantastic player for us and hopefully it will be the same with Torres."

Benitez is likely to field the pair together after they hit it off in the 2-1 Premiership victory at Aston Villa at the weekend, although given Benitez's penchant for tinkering, it would be no surprise to see either Peter Crouch or Andriy Voronin in the starting line-up.

England striker Crouch and Israel midfielder Yossi Benayoun are back in contention having been left out of the squad against Villa.

The club's website reported that changes were likely from the team that won at Villa Park, with Crouch and Benayoun likely to feature.

"We know it is going to be a difficult game because the French league is of a good standard," Benitez said.

"Toulouse are a good team with good players and we will need to be careful."

One player in particular that Benitez is wary of is Johan Elmander, who scored a last minute winner as Toulouse beat champions Lyon 1-0 on Saturday.

"We have a lot of respect because they have a lot of good players," said the Spaniard. "We were watching Elmander as one of the options for us in the past and I know we can talk about several players."

Gerrard trusts Rafa tactics

AFP, Liverpool

Steven Gerrard said on Tuesday he trusts Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez to make the right decisions about whereabouts in midfield he tells the Reds captain to play.

The England vice-skipper said he was ready to be switched about from his favoured central midfield role or play alongside Spain's Xabi Alonso when Benitez changes tactics to cope with different opponents.

"I don't think all the focus on whether I play in the middle is fair on me, the team or the manager," Gerrard told Liverpool's website.

"Whether I play in the centre or on the right, I'll always continue to work as hard as I can for the team. What's most important to me is the manager trusts me to play in the middle, and we all trust him to make the right choices for the balance of the side.

"I know there will be times when he'll think Xabi and me playing together is the best option, and occasions when he'll use others there and may ask me to do a different role.

"The manager has said we'll be more positive, but we know that may make us weaker at the back, so we have to be careful.

"It's not just about getting all out attack every week against every team, but getting the balance right.

"A different system will suit different teams. Everyone understands that, so different personnel will be used throughout the season."



PHOTO: AFP

Milan's star midfielder Kaka (R) tries a trick against Juve's Czech defender Zdenek Grygera during a triangular tournament also involving Inter Milan at Meazza Stadium in Milan on Tuesday.

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