Hammers sign Dyer

INTERNET, *undated*

Newcastle winger Kieron Dyer has completed his protracted move to West Ham United for a fee as yet undisclosed.

The England midfielder - who was keen to leave St James' Park after seven years in the north-east to be closer to his family - looked like he had missed out on the chance of a move when the deal stalled earlier this month.

West Ham had agreed a fee for the 28-year-old, who can also play in the middle or as a support striker, but the deal hit the buffers when the Magpies decided to up their valuation of the player from around £6 million to nearer £8m.

However that obstacle has now been overcome, allowing him to begin the next phase of his career.

Dyer, who has earned 32 international caps since making his debut in 1999, will link up with a clutch of former Newcastle team-mates including Scott Parker, Craig Bellamy and Lee Bowyer - with whom he had a infamous on-field scuffle in April 2005 - at Upton Park.

West Ham boss Alan Curbishley, who had previously declared the deal dead following Newcastle's change in stance, has already signed Julien Faubert, Freddie Ljungberg and Richard Wright in addition to Bellamy and Parker this summer.

Lazio pleads innocence

INTERNET, *undated*

Lazio have launched a vehement defence of the club, saying incidents surrounding Tuesday's Champions League third round qualifier with Dinamo Bucharest had been blown out of proportion.

UEFA said on Wednesday it would review the Rome first leg, which was marred with five Romanians being injured in clashes with Lazio fans outside the Stadio Olimpico before kick-off.

Racist chanting from a small section of fans was also heard during the 1-1 draw, although it was quickly drowned out by whistles from the rest of the crowd.

"The club finds it sad that these marginal episodes have been over-emphasised by some media organisations," the club said.

"They do not come from the search for objective truth but from the desire to place the team and the fans in a bad light.

"Lazio recall that all Lazio supporters promptly and loudly protested against the sparse group of supporters, whose chants were immediately drowned out by a chorus of dissent."

The club also said it could not be held responsible for the trouble outside the stadium and that it awaited UEFA's findings with confidence.

A UEFA spokesman said on Wednesday: "There is no doubt that there is a violent history surrounding Lazio fans and we always seem to have problems."

Italy has strengthened stadium security following revulsion at the death of a policeman in riots outside a match at Catania in February.

However, Italy's Interior Minister Giuliano Amato said on Wednesday it was difficult to stop violence away from grounds.

Ruud approves of new boys

INTERNET, *undated*

Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy was full of praise for Royston Drenthe and Wesley Sneijder after his compatriots made their debuts for the Spanish champions on Wednesday.

Although Madrid lost their pre-season Carranza Trophy semi-final match against Real Betis 1-0, the new duo did enough to impress van Nistelrooy, who played an hour of the match on his return from a thigh tear picked up in the final game of last season.

Sneijder joined the capital club for 27million euros (£18.2million) from Ajax earlier this month, just days after Drenthe had arrived from Feyenoord on a five-year deal.

"Drenthe and Sneijder were signed because they are important for the team," Van Nistelrooy told the club's website.

"Drenthe is a very young player, similar to [Edgar] Davids. He is very good on the left wing. He has great technique and amazing talent.

"Sneijder is a brilliant, quality player."

The Holland striker also admitted to his delight at his return to action, adding that he expects the team to take time to gel under new coach Bernd Schuster.

"My first game was nearly perfect," he added. "I felt very well on a physical level, but I still need to play more in order to be in optimum form.

"Schuster's style is different; he is good for all of us. There have been many changes on the team, but we are working well and we are united."

PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid left-back Royston Drenthe (R) is tripped by Real Betis midfielder Juande during a pre-season friendly in Cadiz on Wednesday.

Real fail to shine again

Football

INTERNET, *undated*

A 94th minute free-kick from Argentine attacking midfielder Juan Pablo Caffa handed Bernd Schuster's Real Madrid yet another pre-season defeat.

Ruud van Nistelrooy returned from injury, and Wesley Sneijder and Royston Drenthe also started in a rather attacking formation sent out by Schuster, that included Fernando Gago, Raul and Javier Balboa.

However, Los Merengues were still unable to break through the Real Betis defence, being made to look surprisingly benign once again in the final third of the pitch.

There were a few half chances for Van Nistelrooy in the first half, but by and large, it was a display that failed to inspire much confidence.

In fact, it was Real Betis who had the better of the exchanges, Odonkor testing Casillas in the 15th minute, and then Rafael Sobis charging up the right but failing to finish from a tight angle.

Real Madrid had their first chance in the 24th minute, when Van Nistelrooy received a good long pass from Pepe, but failed to get power into his shot. He had another in the 38th minute, but fired wide from a tight angle following a pass from Balboa.

Chances has been few and far between before the break, and that continued in the second half, thanks also to the large number of substitutions.

Once again, it was Betis who had the first chance, albeit almost 20 minutes in. Casillas was alert, and just about palmed away a Mark Gonzalez header, after Rafael Sobis had flicked a corner on.

There was one more chance, after another fifteen slow minutes, once again for the Andalucians. However, Fernando failed to finish past Casillas following a quick counter-attack, and the dull story continued.

With ten minutes to go, the focus was already turning towards the penalty shoot-out. People wanted some excitement, and maybe that was the only option. However, that was not to be, as Real Betis decided to make Madrid pay the penalty for looking too far ahead.

It was a good free-kick from Caffa, but it had to be said that it flew past a rather static and unruly Madrid wall, and a slow Dudek. Ironically, the Pole had just come on for Iker Casillas in the 90th minute, specifically for the shoot-out!

Madrid were stunned, but to be fair, Real Betis had enjoyed a lion's share of the chances, and actually made their opponents play according to their plans. With ten days to the start of the season, Schuster still has plenty of work to do.

Messi spoils Scholl farewell

Football

AFP, *Munich*

Argentina forward Lionel Messi spoiled Bayern Munich's party for retired star Mehmet Scholl with a late strike to seal Barcelona's 1-0 win at the Allianz Arena on Wednesday.

Messi rifled home his shot from the edge of the penalty area six minutes from time and in the end that proved enough to hand Barcelona the inaugural Franz Beckenbauer Cup.

The match was both a testimonial for midfielder Scholl as well as an official farewell to Dutch striker Roy Makaay, who joined Feyenoord in the summer, as Bayern waved goodbye to two of their stalwarts.

"A small comfort for me is that the goal was conceded when I was off the pitch," Scholl told German broadcaster ARD after his final appearance in the famous red shirt.

"It's not easy to walk away from something which has been a huge part of my life, but these 50 minutes gave me so much.

"Now, I have to start a new chapter in my life."

Scholl, 36, retired in May after 15 years at Bayern, making more than 300 appearances for the German giants and winning 36 caps for Germany.

"Such a player will be missed by the Bundesliga, no question about it," said Bayern president Beckenbauer after Scholl became only the second player, after Brazilian Giovane Elber, to be given Bayern's Player of Honour award.

Bayern rested their top stars Franck Ribery and Miroslav Klose for the first half, but played Mark van Bommel, Bastian Schweinsteiger, Philipp Lahm and Italian World Cup winner Luca Toni.

The Spaniards, who beat Bayern 4-0 in a similar pre-season warm-up at the Nou Camp stadium, brought many of their top stars including Ronaldinho, Thierry Henry, Messi and Samuel Eto'o.

While Barcelona are preparing for the new season, Bayern began their Bundesliga campaign with a 3-0 win over Hansa Rostock last Saturday and are away to their deadly rivals Werder Bremen this weekend.

The first half was a high-tempo affair with both sides showing plenty in attack, but there was little in the way of finishing with several chances squandered.

Every time Henry and Ronaldinho moved into a threatening position, Bayern's defence were quick to close them down, while Schweinsteiger and Toni went close at the other end.

At half time Ronaldinho was rested, while Klose joined the action and the biggest cheer was saved for the 54th minute when Scholl left the Allianz Arena for the final time, being replaced by Ribery.

There were a host of changes in the second half with both sides taking the opportunity to use their squads.

Messi finally broke the deadlock on 84 minutes when the 20-year-old hit his ferocious shot from the edge of the penalty area which gave Bayern's replacement goalkeeper Michael Rensing no chance.

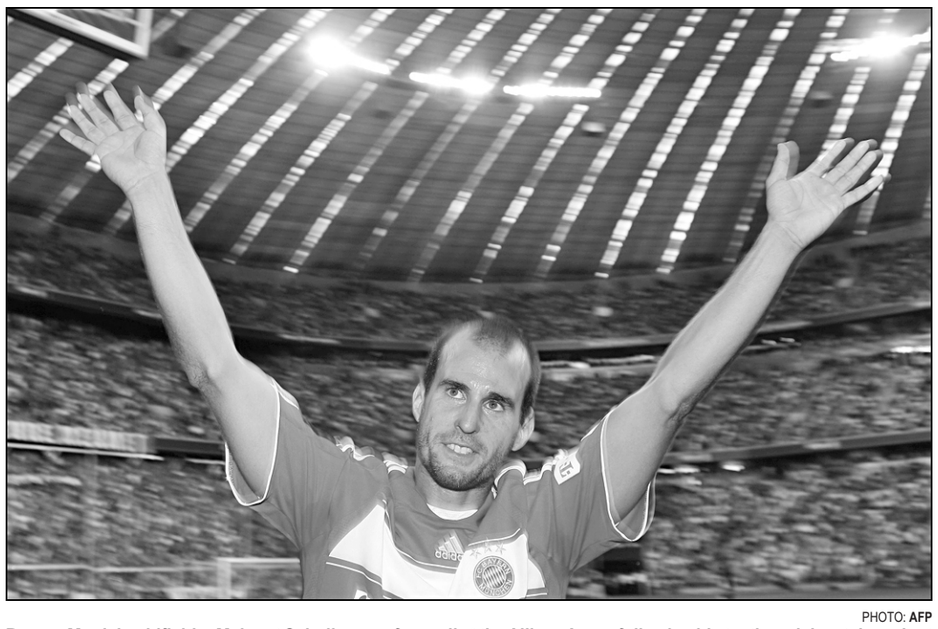

PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich midfielder Mehmet Scholl waves farewell at the Allianz Arena following his testimonial match against Barcelona on Wednesday.

Alves confident of Chelsea deal

AFP, *London*

Daniel Alves's agent said Wednesday he was "80 to 90 percent confident" that Sevilla will strike a deal to sell the Brazil right-back to Chelsea.

The English Premier League title-chasers have denied reports they have reached an agreement with the Spanish side to buy the defender.

The London club have, however, confirmed they are interested in signing the 24-year-old from the UEFA Cup holders.

Alves was left out of Sevilla's squad for Wednesday's Champions League qualifier first leg at home to AEK Athens, fuelling speculation that a move to west London was imminent.

"I am confident in the Chelsea directors. I understand Chelsea is not easy to be driven but let's say at least we are 80 to 90 percent confident that we can close the agreement," Geronimo Suarez told BBC radio.

Spanish giants Real Madrid have also been linked with the Brazil international but Suarez has reiterated Alves' declaration that he wants to head to Stamford Bridge.

"He is determined to go there," Suarez said.

"He has spoken in these terms a lot of times, he has said to the press here in Seville that he is 100 percent determined to go Chelsea.

"He asked for the Seville club to close the agreement with Chelsea as soon as possible. These are his own words."

Suarez said he thought Tuesday was "the perfect day to close the agreement."

However, he added: "It didn't arrive so it may be two or three days or a maximum of one week before both clubs must find a solution.

"We cannot continue in this way for a long time because the player is suffering a lot here.

"Now we are in a complicated moment between the clubs because both are determined to close a deal but it is not easy to finalise in this case. We will need more time, more patience and more confidence in the clubs.

"We are far enough (apart) to not be close and allow the deal, but close enough to be confident that finally the clubs will be able to reach an agreement for the player."

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-euro (48.5-million-dollar) switch to Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea said in a statement: "Contrary to reports from Spain, Chelsea Football Club has not reached an agreement for the transfer of Daniel Alves from Sevilla.

"Chelsea FC has confirmed its interest in the player to the club but as yet there is no agreement."

The Spanish press said the signing would pave the way for Dutch winger Arjen Robben's proposed move from Chelsea to Real Madrid, for around 30 million euros.

Domenech to back allegations

AFP, *Paris*

France coach Raymond Domenech insisted Thursday that he was relishing the chance to back up his recent allegations of match fixing in Italy before European football's governing body UEFA.

Domenech alluded last week to "a referee being bought" during a tie between France and Italy's under-21 sides in 1999 when he was coach of the French team.

UEFA president Michel Platini has demanded that his countryman provide proof of his allegations or face sanctions.

And Domenech said that he was looking forward to the opportunity.

"UEFA have demanded an investigation and I have to respond, I'm going to write and will go before them with pleasure. I've even bought a tie (for the occasion). I don't have the date yet," Domenech told a press conference.

"Out of respect it's only normal that I reserve what I have to say for those who have to study this dossier. I'm not a UEFA judge, the only thing I'm afraid of is losing a match, and nothing else worries me."

In the interview last week Domenech said: "It is not me who invented the refereeing sagas in Italy...There are arrangements made in Italian football."

Platini insisted that 55-year-old Domenech would be charged with unsporting behaviour if he does not back up his allegations.

France will travel to Italy for their second encounter with the 'Azzurri' in the Euro 2008 qualification stage on September 8, having won the first match 3-1 on home soil last year.

France, who lost the World Cup final last year to the Italians, currently lead Group B of European qualifiers, two points ahead of Italy in second place with Scotland a further point adrift in third.

Beckham opens account

Football

AP, *Carson*

It was a night of firsts for David Beckham. The English superstar started his first game for the Galaxy, scored his first goal on a free kick in the 27th minute as Los Angeles beat D.C. United 2-0 in the SuperLiga semifinals.

Beckham also notched his first assist on the Galaxy's second goal. He sent a long pass to a streaking Landon Donovan, who scored on a breakaway in the 47th minute for a 2-0 lead.

The Galaxy advanced to the Aug. 29 tournament final in Carson against Mexican club team Pachuca, who tied Houston 2-2, but won 4-3 on penalty kicks.

The winning team earns 1 million dollars, which the Galaxy could put toward paying Beckham's 6.5 million dollar yearly salary.

Beckham also earned his first yellow card after fouling United's Jaime Moreno in the 18th minute. Beckham got fouled once in the first half, when he also took two corner kicks.

Fans cheered and women screamed as Beckham prepared to take a 26-yard free kick. After he connected inside the left post, he was mobbed by teammates. Goalkeeper Joe Cannon even scampered across more than half the field to join the celebration.

Beckham waved to the crowd a couple times while blue, gold and white confetti fluttered through the air, reminiscent of the scene when he was introduced amid much fanfare July 13.

He was stopped on a 28-yard free kick in the 58th minute, when United goalkeeper Troy Perkins leaped to the left and caught the ball.

In all, Beckham played 63 minutes. He clapped his hands above his head while turning in a circle to acknowledge the cheers before putting the captain's armband on Donovan and heading to the bench.

Beckham had played just 37 minutes in two previous games because of a nagging left ankle injury that didn't allow him to practice with the Galaxy for the first time until Tuesday.

The victory avenged the Galaxy's 1-0 loss to United last week in Major League Soccer action, when Beckham made his league debut on the road.

He was named captain for Wednesday's match, a title previously held by Donovan. Beckham actively urged on his teammates, talking to them and waving his arms during play.

As the halftime whistle blew, Beckham bent over and adjusted his socks, then stood up, a broad smile on his face as he waved and walked off the field.

The game, which wasn't part of the Galaxy season ticket package, attracted an announced crowd of 17,223 in the 27,000-capacity stadium.

Galaxy midfielder Cobi Jones, who is returning from a hip injury, entered in the 71st minute. The team was without defender Ante Jazic, midfielder Kelly Gray and forward Alan Gordon, who were all suspended after receiving yellow cards in each of their two previous SuperLiga games.

PHOTO: AFP

LA Galaxy midfielder David Beckham prepares to unleash a free-kick to score against DC United during their Superliga match at the Home Depot Center in Carson on Wednesday.

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