

Kaka hints at Real move

INTERNET, undated

Milan star Kaka has refused to rule out a move to Real Madrid.

The playmaker has been consistently linked with a transfer to the Bernabau with Real making little secret of their interest in the Brazilian.

Milan, the current UEFA Champions League champions, spent most of the close season turning down Real's advances for Kaka.

However, reports have now suggested that Real are prepared to renew their approach for the 25-year-old.

Real president Ramon Calderon, is thought to be lining up a fresh bid for Kaka in the January transfer window as the La Liga champions bid to defend their title.

Milan club president Silvio Berlusconi, however, has said that the Serie A giants would do their best to prevent their star asset from leaving.

Kaka, though, has not ruled out a move to Italy in the wake of the fresh speculation.

"I have a contract with Milan until 2011, I am not in a hurry to renew it and neither are Milan," Kaka told Italian media.

"Florentino Perez [Calderon] must talk with Berlusconi. If they find an agreement OK, otherwise I stay here."

Kaka has also hinted that his Brazilian compatriot and current Barcelona ace Ronaldinho could be interested in a move to Milan.

"Everytime we meet up with the national team, Ronaldinho asks me about Milan, the team and the club," added Kaka.

"I don't know if he can come. Certainly he has feelings for us."

Pfister named Cameroon coach

AFP, Yaounde

Germany's Otto Pfister has been named coach of the Cameroon football team, the country's sports ministry said on Friday.

The 69-year-old Pfister, who led Togo at the 2006 World Cup finals, takes over from Jules Niyongha who had been interim coach for several months since the departure of previous boss Arie Haan of the Netherlands.

Fergie lauds Anderson

INTERNET, undated

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson reckons Brazilian teenager Anderson has already gone some way to justifying his hefty transfer fee. United may eventually pay Porto 17 million pounds for Anderson and although the 19-year-old initially struggled to adapt to the Premier League, Ferguson has been impressed by what he has seen.

"The thing that has impressed us all is his knowledge," said Ferguson. "I noticed him the other night directing players who were much older than him."

"That is a nice sight to see from a young lad of 19, considering his English is not perfect."

"He missed the pre-season because of the Copa America, so it took him some time to get his fitness levels up. But he is there now."

"We knew there would be a time when we had to see what he is capable of. Maybe, because of the injuries, that time has come a bit earlier than we might have expected. But he has taken to the job very well."

Bojinov set for Jan return

INTERNET, undated

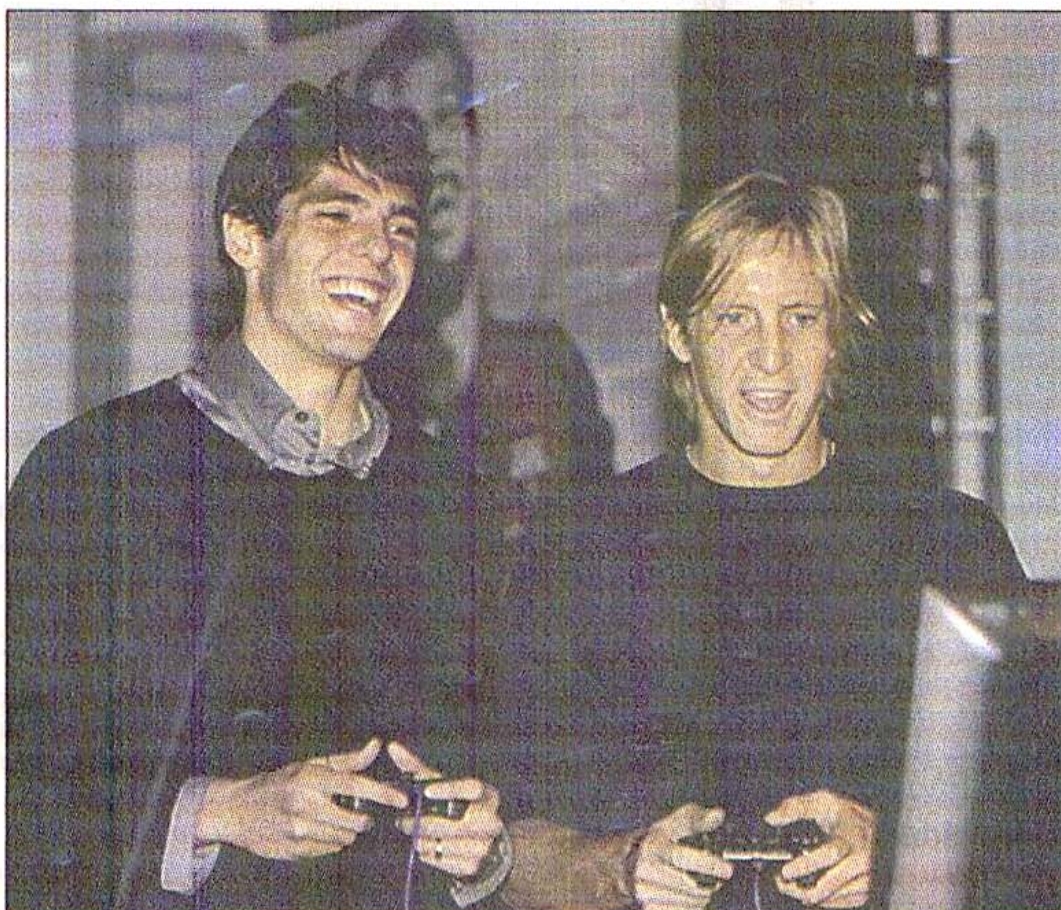
Manchester City striker Valeri Bojinov could be back in action by January, the club's fitness coach said on Friday. Bojinov ruptured cruciate knee ligaments during the Manchester derby win over United in August, a desperate piece of ill fortune for the 21-year-old, eager to make an impression at his new club following a summer move from Fiorentina.

The Bulgaria international was forced to return to Italy for surgery but is now back at City's Carrington training complex to continue his rehabilitation work.

Blues boss Sven-Goran Eriksson is refusing to set a timescale on Bojinov's recovery, preferring instead to ensure the forward - once the youngest foreign player ever to appear in Serie A - is fully fit before he faces the demands of Premier League life once more.

However, according to City fitness coach Stefano Marrone, City fans could be in for a very welcome post-Christmas present.

"Players need targets for motivation, so anything around January would be great," Marrone told the club's website.



TIME OUT: AC Milan midfielders Kaka (L) and Massimo Ambrosini play a football video game in Milan on Friday.

'Shevchenko struggling'

AFP, London

Avram Grant admits Andriy Shevchenko is struggling to recover from the shock of being benched by Jose Mourinho.

Shevchenko has failed to live up to his 30 million pounds price tag since his move from AC Milan last year and Mourinho quickly lost patience with the Ukrainian striker.

One of Grant's main roles when he joined Chelsea as director of football in pre-season was to bring the best out of Shevchenko, but Mourinho was unimpressed by his form and opted to continue leaving him out.

Mourinho has since departed and Grant has taken over, but Shevchenko is still stuck on the sidelines at Stamford Bridge.

The 31-year-old has been reduced to a bit part role, scoring only once this season and making occasional cameo appearances.

Grant believes his nightmare spell at the club may well have taken its toll on Shevchenko's mental and physical well-being and therefore affected his performances.

The Israeli denied Chelsea have appointed former British Olympic sprinter Darren Campbell to help Shevchenko regain his spark but insisted the club have been trying to help.

"I prefer only to say that he was not at his best from the beginning of the year but there are many reasons for this," Grant said.

"You never know if it is because of the mental side that the player doesn't look so good in the physical side, or if it has come from the physical side. Sometimes it is both."

"We are talking about professional players. They need to handle everything. We are not baby-sitters of the players."

"We tried to help him as we try to help other players. But the players feel they need to help themselves. We have a big squad and we will need everybody, including Andriy Shevchenko."

Grant still believes Shevchenko can recapture the form that made him the most feared striker in Europe.

"Andriy was a very good player and he is still a very good player, even if he is not playing now," he said.

"I know from my experience there are some periods when players are not at their best, but it doesn't mean they are finished."

"Some players who are not in the team can come back well. That is the case with Shevchenko."

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Owen awaits summer

INTERNET, undated

Sam Allardyce has admitted Newcastle will sit down with Michael Owen in the summer to discuss his long-term future at the club.

There has been speculation that the England striker's career lies away from St James' Park, with reports of a clause in his contract allowing him to move for £6million.

The existence of such a clause has been ruled out by the club, and Allardyce's first focus is keeping the injury-hit Owen fit and scoring goals for the Magpies.

The former Liverpool striker has made just 17 league starts for Newcastle since his club-record 16 million pound move from Real Madrid in August 2005.

A metatarsal injury ruled Owen out for the much of his first season, and his second was wrecked by the cruciate ligament damage sustained on England duty in the 2006 World Cup.

Allardyce told The Daily Mail: "There is no clause in Michael Owen's contract. There's no way Michael can leave unless we want him to."

"Saying that, if Michael was as determined as some players are when they decide they want to go, that would be a different story. "But at the moment, we're

hoping Michael stays fit and plays continuously for Newcastle from now until the end of the season."

"If he does that, we can have a good look at the situation then."

Owen has already admitted his determination to win over the doubters in the Toon Army by bringing silverware to the club and insists he is not looking to move on.

Former England boss Sven Goran Eriksson has hinted he could be interested in bringing the prolific scorer to Manchester City.

But Allardyce had a blunt warning for his Premier League rival, despite the financial backing Eriksson enjoys under new City owner Thaksin Shinawatra.

He stated: "You probably can't afford him."

Ballack back in training

AFP, Berlin

German captain Michael Ballack is back in training with Chelsea, six months after the midfielder first damaged his ankle playing for the English giants.

Much has changed at Stamford Bridge since Ballack, 31, injured his ankle in the Premier League clash with Newcastle United on April 22 - coach Jose Mourinho has departed and they lost last season's title race to Manchester United.

And in his absence, Germany made sure of their Euro 2008 place with a 0-0 draw against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin earlier this month.

But Ballack was at Chelsea's training ground in Cobham on Friday doing some light skills and fitness work, so a return to full training is on the horizon.

"I am back kicking a ball again," Ballack told German tabloid Bild. "For the moment I am still training alone, but I assume I will be able to play again this year."

It has been a long road back for the German captain who had an ankle operation on his left ankle on April 27 and then needed a further up in July, which held up his recovery.

"The injury was a bit worse than I was first told," said Ballack.

"Originally, it looked like it would have healed in three or four weeks, but it took a lot longer than that in the end."

There is a chance Ballack will be fit for Germany's two remaining Euro 2008 qualifying games against Cyprus on November 17 and Wales on November 22.

Totti doubt for Milan clash

AFP, Rome

Injured Roma captain and striker Francesco Totti is in doubt for the Serie A match against AC Milan this weekend, coach Luciano Spalletti said Friday.

"It will be difficult for Totti to take the field against Milan on Sunday, and there is also some doubt about (Rodrigo) Taddei," Spalletti told Italian agency ANSA.

Totti picked up an ankle knock in Roma's 2-1 Champions League win over Sporting Lisbon in midweek, which followed their 4-4 draw against Napoli in the Serie A last Saturday.

That result left Roma in fourth, and Spalletti believes Milan, despite sitting in 11th place, are a formidable challenge.

"Milan are a great team, a 0-0 draw, 1-1, wouldn't be bad, but nothing is guaranteed."

Milan thumped Shakhtar Donetsk 4-1 midweek in the Champions League but have made a slow start to the season and are already 10 points behind their arch rivals Inter.

Pennant breaks his leg

AFP, London

Jermaine Pennant needs surgery on his right leg, Liverpool football club revealed on Friday, meaning he will be out of action for 10 weeks.

The winger limped out of the Reds' Champions League defeat at Besiktas on Wednesday night and the club have now confirmed he has been carrying a problem for almost the whole of this season. He will go under the knife this weekend.

Club spokesman Ian Cotton said on the Reds' official website, www.liverpoolfc.tv: "For the last eight weeks Jermaine has undergone intensive treatment at Melwood between matches for the injury. But following an acute exacerbation of the problem during the game against Besiktas, it has now been decided he requires surgery."

"We anticipate Jermaine will be out for approximately 10 weeks."

Liverpool have a big match on Sunday at Anfield with the visit of Premier League leaders Arsenal.

Keane backs O'Leary for Ireland

THE GUARDIAN

Roy Keane has endorsed David O'Leary's candidature to be the next manager of the Republic of Ireland and urged the Football Association of Ireland to appoint the former Leeds United and Aston Villa manager.

"I think Dave would be a good choice," said the Sunderland manager and former Ireland midfielder when asked to identify the best potential successor to the sacked Steve Staunton. "I just think he would do a good job. And the role would suit him, he would not have to work every day and could still do his television stuff."

Despite that little dig at his former international teammate, Keane is serious about the short-priced favourite's credentials. "Dave's all right," he said. "He was not a big mate of mine but nobody was. People might argue with me but he has done decent jobs wherever he's been. He did an OK job as manager at Aston Villa and was decent at Leeds."

"Dave is not in a job at the moment and the FAI would have to pay no compensation, which I'm sure will be a consideration for them but I also think that sometimes international jobs are suited to people like Dave."

"As a manager, he has blooded a lot of young players and is good at working with them, which would help Ireland. He just has that bit of experience. He's dealt with the media, can handle them and he's got a good reputation in Ireland."

Keane is held in far higher regard among his compatriots but was quick to rule himself out of contention, insisting "I prefer the day-to-day stuff", before lamenting the state of his country's top-level football. "Ireland have no world-class players at the moment," he reflected. "The quality is not there."

Keane, who like O'Leary is represented by the lawyer Michael Kennedy, suspects the national team's move from Lansdowne Road to Croke Park has not helped their cause. "Croke Park might not have helped Steve Staunton's situation," he said. "Lansdowne Road was a difficult place for teams to go but opponents seem to enjoy Croke."

Ramos reveals reasons

AFP, Madrid

Juande Ramos has spoken for the first time to explain why he quit Sevilla to replace Martin Jol as manager of struggling Spurs.

The Spaniard tendered his resignation with Sevilla on Friday night, and could be in charge of Tottenham for Wednesday's fourth round League Cup tie with Blackpool.

Spurs gave Ramos, who is reported to have been offered a deal worth around seven million euros a season, a take it or leave it ultimatum after sacking Jol on Friday morning.

Ramos, in his first public comments about the move, said: "My heart will remain in Nervion (the area of Seville where the club's ground is located) but for my family and my profession it is impossible not to leave for London."

"After the excellent period that Sevilla has enjoyed fate has dictated that my path now takes me on the most ambitious challenge I've ever faced."

In the statement on his personal website the 53-year-old added: "To the red and white family of the Sanchez Pizjuan (Sevilla's stadium) I only say to you that I could go very far away but, Sevillista friend, I assure you, that nobody will ever be closer to you."

Sevilla later announced that they had appointed reserve coach Manolo Jimenez to succeed Ramos.

Sevilla confirmed Ramos' departure on Friday night on their official website, declaring: "Juande Ramos appeared on the third floor of the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan (stadium) to present a document in which he asked for his contract to be rescinded under clause 1006/85 at 22.35pm (local time)."

"Ramos was accompanied by his physical trainer Marcos Alvarez, who presented the same document



JUANDE RAMOS

to the general director of the club, Jose Maria Cruz, in the presence of Ramon Rodriguez Monchi, the club's sporting director."

Ramos looks to certain to be working alongside former Spurs midfielder Gus Poyet, whose future as Dennis Wise's assistant at Leeds was thrown into doubt on Friday evening.

He was told to stay away from the Leeds' dugout for Saturday's League One fixture.

"In the best interests of the team he will not be in attendance at Elland Road for the fixture against Millwall to allow the players to fully focus on the game without any distractions," read a statement from Leeds.

The pair's initial task will be lifting the spectre of relegation that has haunted the club all season. Spurs are languishing in third from bottom after one win from 10 games.

Spurs, who first approached Ramos on the first week of the season when club officials famously met him at the Alfonso XIII hotel in Seville, will attempt to appoint the duo swiftly as they look to salvage something from their season.

Jol's assistant Chris Hughton was also dismissed in Thursday's 'night of the long knives' at White Hart Lane, while goalkeeper coach Hans Segers was asked to step down with immediate effect on Friday.

Jol was expected to take a few days holiday before considering his options.

Spurs are less laid back about their own situation and Clive Allen's appointment as caretaker for the Blackburn game on Sunday is seen as extremely short term, unlike when David Pleat took over for most of the 2003-04 season.

Back in Spain Jimenez, 43, a former player with the club, held his first training session on Saturday morning, the club announced.

His first match in charge is against Valencia at home on Sunday.

Frankfurt held to a draw

INTERNET, undated



The hosts enjoyed more possession but lacked a cutting edge and in the end neither goalkeeper had to make many saves.

Hannover were almost hit on the break after 29 minutes when Albert Streit broke down the left. He found Marcus Weissenberger who

held the ball up before laying it off to Junichi Inamoto, who smashed the ball high and wide from 25 yards.

Two minutes later Alexander Meier cut inside and curled his effort toward the top corner from 25 yards but Hannover goalkeeper Robert Enke brilliantly tipped the ball over the bar.

Hannover had the best chance of the half on 34 minutes when Frankfurt keeper Markus Proll rushed out, but his poor clearance fell to Szabolcs Huszti who skewed the ball wide of an empty net from 25 yards.

It was the visitors who created the first chance after half-time

when Christian Schulz headed a Sergio Pinto corner over the bar on 48 minutes.

Five minutes later a long throw caused panic in the Frankfurt defence and the ball fell to Schulz who shot from the edge of the area.

His effort looked tame but it went under Proll's body, although the keeper recovered before Pinto could put away the loose ball.

Eintracht had a final chance to break the deadlock after 78 minutes when Ioannis Amanatidis was set free on the left of the area by Inamoto, but Enke made a good save to push the ball around the post.



Frankfurt midfielder Benjamin Koehler (R) fights for possession with Hannover winger Jan Rosenthal during their Bundesliga match in Frankfurt on Friday.

Rafa comes out fighting

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez has moved to shrug off mounting concerns over his leadership by insisting his side will reverse the slide which has dented the club's European and domestic ambitions.

Liverpool, who are fighting to stay alive in the Champions League after slumping to Besiktas on Wednesday, entertain Premier League leaders Arsenal at Anfield on Sunday knowing defeat will virtually kill off their title ambitions.

Despite Benitez delivering the Champions League and FA Cup during his three-year reign, fans have started to question his tactics yet, on the eve of Arsenal's visit, the Spaniard insisted he did not feel under any added pressure.

"When I was at Valencia we won the title, but I was still under pressure," Benitez said.

"People expected from the beginning to win everything."

"Then in the season that we won the title for the second time I again found myself under pressure."

"Pressure is nothing new to me. You know that people are talking, but the only thing you can do is to remain focused."

"Is the pressure in England worse than in Spain? No."

Liverpool and Arsenal are unbeaten in the Premier League yet the two clubs could not be further apart in terms of confidence.

Wenger's side, who scored 10 goals in three games at Anfield last season on their way to eliminating Liverpool from both domestic cups, arrive on Merseyside having crushed Slavia Prague by seven goals in the Champions League in midweek, their 12th straight victory.

In contrast, Liverpool slipped to a desperate 2-1 defeat to Besiktas to leave themselves requiring victories in all three remaining group games to remain in the hunt for

Europe's top prize.

Despite an unconvincing win over Everton seven days ago, they have won just once at home in the Premier League at Anfield, and co-owner Tom Hicks was forced to come out in support of Benitez's work in the wake of the Besiktas debacle.

Benitez, who is set to welcome back Spanish striker Fernando Torres from a thigh injury, remains defiant.

"There's a big difference to last season because I think we were 12 points behind Chelsea at this stage," he added.

"But I have confidence that we will beat Arsenal. That will leave us three points behind them. In the last three games we have shown character and now we have Steven Gerrard playing well while the likes of Torres are coming back from injury."

"The main managers need a lot of time to build a team to win the title and if every manager who

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