

Sheringham to call it quits

AFP, London

Former Manchester United and England striker Teddy Sheringham will retire at the end of the season.

Sheringham on Saturday revealed that he is planning to finish the current campaign with English Championship club Colchester and then bring an end to his 26-year career.

The 41-year-old won 51 caps for his country and helped Manchester United win the Champions League in 1999, scoring the equaliser against Bayern Munich and laying on Ole Gunnar Solskjær's winner.

Sheringham, who also had spells with Tottenham, West Ham, Nottingham Forest and Millwall, had considered playing on until he was 50 to emulate Sir Stanley Matthews, but he will hang up his boots in May.

"My Dad wanted me to carry on and beat Sir Stanley Matthews' record but I feel this season is the right time to bow out."

"I've had a fantastic time and want to thank all those that have contributed to my career and helped me along the way."

"I've no immediate thoughts about going into management but football has always been my life and hopefully I will be back at some point in the future."

"Until then I have to try and help Colchester stay in the Championship."

Adriano in hot water

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Adriano was in more trouble on Friday when he arrived late for training with his club Sao Paulo left early and threatened a cameraman.

The striker, who has joined the Brazilian champions on loan from Inter Milan in a bid to resurrect his faltering career, could face a fine for his latest misdemeanour, the club said.

"We're going to analyse the facts, to decide whether or not there will be a fine," Sao Paulo general manager Marco Aurelio Cunha told reporters.

"The important thing here is that there is a healthy atmosphere. People have to be happy here and if they are not happy, they don't need to stay."

Brazilian media reported that Adriano arrived nearly half an hour late for a fitness training session.

They said he left early and threatened a cameraman who tried to photograph him walking out of the ground.

"This is absolutely wrong and I cannot justify this at all," said Cunha.

On Thursday, Adriano was also under the spotlight for wearing a T-shirt instead of the official club uniform as the team arrived at Sao Paulo airport following a flight from Colombia.

But Sao Paulo played down the incident, saying he had been given permission for the change of attire on the plane.

Adriano, one of the world's most feared strikers, has suffered a dramatic loss of form over the last 18 months amid fitness and reported alcohol problems and has barely played for either Inter or Brazil.

After signing for Sao Paulo last month, he promised to turn over a new leaf but two days later he was photographed at a pop concert in Rio de Janeiro holding a beer can.

One week later, he was involved in a car accident in Rio. Although nobody was injured, the accident happened in the early hours of the morning, raising more suspicions that he had been out on the town.

Spain headed for trouble

AFP, Madrid

Spain's participation in the Euro 2008 finals could be in jeopardy after a clash between the country's courts and the national football association threatened to lead to a row with FIFA.

The Spanish football federation (RFEF) and its president Angel Maria Villar wanted to delay the next presidential elections despite demands from the government in December that all non-Olympic federations hold elections before the Beijing Olympics in August.

Spanish judicial sources said that the appeal by the RFEF was rejected because public interest demanded that the vote take place.

However, FIFA president Sepp Blatter has threatened that any unnecessary government interference in the administration of football in Spain could result in the exclusion of national teams and clubs from international competition.

Two weeks ago, the Spanish secretary of state for sport, Jaime Lissavetzky had insisted that FIFA directives were compatible with Spanish law.

"Sometimes there is tension which can be overcome and I hope this will only be a debate and not develop into anything untoward," Lissavetzky said.

Greece only just escaped a ban from international competition before the 2002 World Cup after FIFA expressed displeasure at government interference in footballing administrative issues.

"We respect everyone's opinion but I defend the sovereignty of Spain," insisted Lissavetzky, adding he had an obligation to see Spanish legislation complied with.

Rafa sure star will stay

AFP, Bolton



Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez has denied any suggestion that Steven Gerrard is not happy with life at Anfield as he prepares to take his side to Bolton on Sunday.

Gerrard claimed this week that not even a second Champions League win in four years would make up for Liverpool's miserable failure in the Premiership.

The England international claimed that battling for fourth place is not good enough for a club of the stature of Liverpool, who have not won the title since 1990 and are 17 points off leaders Arsenal.

There had been speculation that Gerrard's comments had given some of Europe's top clubs encouragement that the midfielder, 27, might be tempted away from Anfield.

But Benitez is adamant that his captain is going nowhere.

He said: "Steven's commitment to this club is 100 per cent. He was trying to show he was disappointed with our position in the league."

"I was talking with him before our last training session and he's really pleased with our position in the Champions League."

"I was talking with him and for Steven to play in this competition is amazing and the most important trophy that he has won is the Champions League in Istanbul."

Liverpool go into the Bolton clash three points adrift of Everton in the battle for fourth place and the final Champions League qualifying slot, but with the advantage of a game in hand.

A win for Liverpool will increase the pressure on their Merseyside rivals, who entertain Portsmouth later on Sunday.

Australian star Harry Kewell is not expected to be involved at Bolton having but Benitez revealed that the winger has been putting in extra training in an attempt to force his way into the first team.

Kewell has not been involved in the Reds' last two matches and is out of contract in the summer.

A big question mark remains over whether Benitez will offer him an extension but the Spaniard added: "It's true that Harry came to see me and that it was his idea to do extra training with the reserves to build up his fitness."

"He has a professional mentality and his approach is very positive."

"He must carry on working hard and making sure he is ready for any opportunity, but I have no problem with him at all."

Benitez will be aiming for a first win at the Reebok at the fourth attempt.

"We know their style of football," Benitez said. "They play direct and are a physical team so we know it will be tough and playing at the Reebok Stadium in the past has been difficult for us."

"It will be tough but we have confidence because we are training well."

Bolton captain Kevin Nolan hopes that Benitez will once again be complaining about his team's playing style after the game.

The boyhood Liverpool fan said: "When managers go away moaning that is the way we want it."

"When they are going away moaning that means most of the time they have gone away with no points at all and hopefully that will be the case on Sunday."

"Sunday's game is a massive game and whether you are playing the top eight or the bottom eight, every game is tough."

Wenger wants protection

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger believes Eduardo's horrific injury was the inevitable result of Arsenal being singled out by teams who try to rough them up.

Eduardo will be sidelined for at least a year with a broken leg caused by Martin Taylor's challenge on the Croatian last weekend.

While Wenger is willing to give Taylor the benefit of the doubt after he insisted he didn't mean to harm Eduardo, the Gunners manager is convinced the Birmingham defender's aggressive attitude stemmed from a widespread belief that Arsenal can be bullied.

The Frenchman stopped short of openly accusing Birmingham manager Alex McLeish of telling his players to kick Arsenal.

But he made it clear he suspects that is the sort of instruction opposing managers give their teams before they face the Premier League leaders.

"We could speak a long time about that. I'm long enough in the game to know what happens in the dressing rooms before the games. At some stage when I'm not in the job any more I can talk to you about it," Wenger said.

"It's not down to my responsibility to think about other teams. I ask my teams to play football and what the other managers do is down to their responsibility."

Wenger has always railed against the lack of protection given to Arsenal. Now he has the statistics that prove his team are more sinned against than sinning.

"The real basic problem in this league is that for the past three years we are the team which has committed less fouls than any other team, the team who is fouled more than any other team, the team who is punished more than any other team - and I do not read that anywhere," Wenger said.

"Facts are facts. Every four fouls, Arsenal gets a yellow card and every nine fouls some other team gets yellow cards."

"The numbers are available for everybody in the OPTA statistics. Look at them."

"I should invite you sometimes to come into the dressing room and look at the legs of Alexander Hleb after a game. You would be amazed. But what is happening is not a surprise to us."

"Don't get me wrong. There are a lot of things I love here, the passion, the commitment. I do not want England lose that, because that is above every other country in the world."

"But it is in the hands of the referee to protect, to make the distinction between how far you can go and what you cannot."

Lost in the drama of Eduardo's injury was the extraordinary reaction of Arsenal captain William Gallas to Birmingham's last minute penalty equaliser.

Gallas stormed away in frustration while the penalty was taken, before kicking an advertising hoarding and then sitting on the pitch for several minutes after the match.

Wenger insisted Gallas's petulant display was only a sign of his competitive spirit. He said: "He is a guy who is highly committed and sometimes when he goes overboard he can respond like that."

"He's an explosive one. He's a guy who when he is fed up, he is fed up."

"You want people in this job who care. What I hate the most in this job are people who are always nice and behave well. But at the end of the day they cheat a little bit with their commitment."

"I prefer sometimes a guy who goes over board without hurting anybody who cares about winning. That is William, he cares about winning."

"Gallas's leadership qualities for me are outstanding, even if on that occasion he used his commitment in the wrong way."

Brazil playmaker Kaka, who this week extended his contract with AC Milan until 2013, wants to spend the rest of his career at the club.

"Last year the Milan Channel asked me if I wanted to stay for life and on that occasion I didn't have the confidence and drive (to commit myself) I have today," FIFA's World Player of the Year told the club's in-house television station on Friday.

"Today I can say it. I want to stay Rossonero all of my career. I want to stay here for life."

According to Italian media reports, the 25-year-old will earn nine million euros (\$13.67 million) a year net under the terms of his new deal with the European champions.

Kaka also said he wanted to skipper Milan one day.

"This is my fifth season at Milan," he said. "I want to become a symbol, a standard-bearer and one day a captain of this club."

Kaka was the driving force behind Milan's victorious Champions League campaign last season, scoring 10 goals.

The seven-times European champions have fended off several attempts by Real Madrid to buy the player, with the Spanish champions making an offer of 80 million euros in the close season.

Milanista for life: Kaka

REUTERS, Milan

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Cagliari docked three points

AFP, Rome

Italian first division bottom dogs Cagliari have been docked three points following a dispute with the Italian Football Federation (IFF).

The Sardinian club took legal action against former player Gianluca Grassano who in a newspaper interview accused Cagliari of doping violations and of having ties to groups of violent supporters.

Under IFF rules, however, clubs are obliged to either take their complaints before a sports tribunal or seek IFF clearance before taking such legal action.

On top of the three points deduction, the club was fined 20,000 euros while chairman Massimo Cellino was fined 10,000 euros and suspended from his position for a year.

The points deduction means that Cagliari have just 15 points from 25 games and are six points adrift of second-bottom Reggina.

Russian Elena Dementieva celebrates after winning against Italian Francesca Schiavone during their Dubai Open semifinal on Friday.



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Benzema to snub MU

INTERNET, undated

Europe's hottest young star, Karim Benzema, told Sir Alex Ferguson he will be leaving Lyon in the near future but not for Manchester United.

"Benzema is on Ferguson's list of summer targets after helping Lyon to the top of the French League and scoring in the 1-1 draw with United in the Champions League last week."

But the France striker had bad news for Ferguson and other suitors such as Chelsea when he revealed he dislikes the direct style of the Barclays Premier League and would prefer a move to Spain or Italy.

Benzema told Sportsmail: "My current deal with Lyon finishes in June 2012 but if things keep moving on this good trajectory then I believe I'll be sold at some stage."

"Like any professional, I think it's great to progress. If we could win the Champions League that would be perfect, then I could leave with a clear conscience. In recent months my name has been linked to Barcelona, Real Madrid, Juventus and now Manchester United have appeared."

"That is high praise and I'm sure I'd be able to play in England. But I believe my style is perhaps better suited for Spain or Italy. I want to experience new tactics and systems. I don't want to play that direct game all the time."

The president of Lyon has insisted I'm not for sale and has valued me at 90million euros. That is incredible."

Wary Lyon have accused Ferguson of trying to unsettle the 20-year-old but the United boss sought to play down the situation, saying: "When you're asked about a player, you give an honest opinion. We said Benzema was a good player, his teammate (Hatem) Ben Arfa is a good player, Juninho's a good player and so on."

Benzema looked ahead to Tuesday night's Champions League return leg by claiming that Lyon deserved to win the first game.

He said: "The 1-1 score was not just Carlos Tevez's goal in the last minute was very painful for us. The match in Manchester will be difficult but Lyon have no fear."

Rebirth of 'Cavegol'

AFP, Bordeaux

Argentina is beginning to take notice of a once-forgotten striker who, with eight goals in seven matches for French league giants Bordeaux, is hoping for a dream call-up to the national squad.

Fernando Cavenaghi has been in inspirational form for the former league champions, who are now virtually the only team capable of challenging six-time consecutive winners Lyon for the French championship.

The performances of 'Cavegol' have attracted an Argentine journalist to the training ground of the southwestern French club. That was far from being the case not so long ago, when Cavenaghi plied his trade with Spartak Moscow.

"The Argentine press have been calling me up a lot in recent weeks because of the goals I've scored," said Cavenaghi, who scored 55 goals in 88 matches with Argentine giants River Plate prior to his move to Moscow.

"It's great for me. I'm doing some great things here at Bordeaux. In Russia, I didn't have so many calls."

With 12 goals in 51 matches over three seasons in Russia, Cavenaghi definitely seems more at home in the warmer climes of Bordeaux.

Despite having had no contact with Argentina coach Alfio Basile, Cavenaghi's re-discovery of his scoring touch has given him ideas about pulling on the famous sky blue and white jersey.

However that dream is tempered by what style of striker Basile is after. And there is no shortage of quality among the South American giants.

"I haven't spoken with the coach yet, maybe because there are no matches on the horizon," added Cavenaghi, who won the world title with Argentina's under-20 squad in 2003.

"But if I keep scoring goals, maybe I'll get my chance. It would be a dream for me, but it's not easy in Argentina, there's a lot of quality players fighting for a spot."

He added: "All the Argentinian strikers have different styles to their game. (Lionel) Messi and (Carlos) Tevez are not really pure strikers, my game is more similar to that of (Hernan) Crespo."

"Every one has his qualities. We just have to wait and see what kind of player the coach is looking for."

Grant can't stand 'lies'

AFP, London

The mounting pressure on Avram Grant was reflected in an uncharacteristically emotional outburst on Friday with the Chelsea boss hitting back furiously over the criticism he has faced in the wake of the club's League Cup final defeat to Tottenham.

Although Chelsea remain in the hunt for the Champions League, Premier League and FA Cup trophies, Grant has had to contend with his leadership qualities being widely questioned, reports of splits within the Chelsea squad and Rijkaard is being lined up to replace him at the end of the season.

"I respect the media in England - even though you gave me no credit at the beginning, but since then I've heard a lot of lies," he said.

"Roman Abramovich has never told me one player that he needs to play, never told me to pick the team this way or that. I'm in charge. Please, you need to respect my professionalism."

"You're (the media) trying to hurt the team, hurt the club because we lost one game."

Grant is resigned to a fresh round of speculation if Chelsea, who have lost ground in the title race following recent draws with Liverpool and Portsmouth, fail to beat West Ham at Upton Park on Saturday.

"If we lose tomorrow... wait with the knife a little bit. When a new player comes to my team, I give him two months to show what he can do."

"You didn't behave too nicely. Now I don't respect you too much because we lost one game and you've taken it too far. I don't like it. You hurt my players, you hurt the club and this is not the right way."

Grant went on to reject suggestions that some players had been critical of his team selection after the game and blamed agents for leaking harmful rumours to the media.

"I agree with Sir Alex Ferguson. Agents came to football to make things easier for the players. But sometimes they link things to the papers they don't need to and sometimes it hurts the team."

Mascherano finally a Kop

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool on Friday secured the services of Javier Mascherano on a long-term basis with the Argentinian midfielder signing a four-year contract with the club.

The announcement brings to an end a protracted and controversial saga over the future of the 23-year-old, who joined Liverpool on loan in January 2007.

Mascherano previously played for West Ham but rights to the player were owned by the Media Sports Investments consortium.

Liverpool did not disclose how much they paid to MSI to make Mascherano's loan deal permanent but the player had been valued at around 18 million pounds.

News that Liverpool have produced the funds necessary will come as a relief to manager Rafael Benitez, who had feared that other clubs would come in for a player regarded as one of the finest defensive midfielders in the world.

Mascherano described the completion of the negotiations as the best moment of his career to date.

He said: "I am very, very happy and now I can concentrate just on playing football."

"I said all along that I wanted to stay at Liverpool and now that I have signed I can say this is the best and the biggest moment in my career so far."

"From the first day I arrived at Liverpool the feeling was good and I knew this was where I wanted to play my football. It's good news for me and my family that everything is sorted and I know where my future is going to be. I just want to do my best for the fans and the people of the club."

"I am at a top side and I know I can win titles here. That's the big thing for me. I want to be at a club where we can win trophies and have success."

Benitez added: "We must be really pleased with the situation now. He has been a key player for us since he has been here and now we know he can be a key player in our future."

"From the start we knew Javier was a player with quality and a fantastic mentality. We knew the player when he was in the reserves at River Plate but was playing for the senior national team and we had been monitoring his career since then."

"He is young but he has great experience having played for his country. We knew he would be a good signing for us."

"It's clear that he is one of the best midfielders in the world but he can get better with us. We now have a lot of good options in the centre of midfield and that's good news for the club."

Chief Executive Rick Parry said the Mascherano signing was proof that Liverpool had not become paralysed by the uncertainty over the future ownership of the club, with American owners George Gillet and Tom Hicks reportedly considering selling out to Dubai Investment Capital.

"It demonstrates that life at the club goes on despite all of the speculation to the contrary and it also demonstrates in very large measure the ongoing commitment of the owners who once again have come good when funds have been needed."

the team; the situation is very good with the team. We're sorry about what happened against Tottenham. I'm sorry, but we did a good job in the previous five months."

Grant's assistant Henk ten Cate confirmed this week that he had been involved in a training ground row with captain John Terry on the eve of the League Cup final.

But the manager angrily insisted that the incident had been blown out of all proportion.

"No team in the world is without fighting. Sometimes it happens. Everything was okay a minute later. They shook hands, hugged."

Grant went on to suggest that he had been treated unfairly by the English media, sections of which have questioned his credentials to succeed Mourinho.

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