

# No lack of experience



AFP, Moscow

Chelsea may be playing their first ever Champions League final and Manchester United appearing in the showpiece event only after a nine year absence but there will be no shortage of experience when the two sides line up at the Luzhniko stadium here on Wednesday.

Such is the spending power of the Premier League that potentially at kick-off, 13 players out of the 22 lining up will have already played in a Champions League final.

Yet only Ryan Giggs and Gary Neville, who is almost certain not to play any part at all, would be doing so for the same club they played for the last time they appeared in European club football's glamour match.

But it is a measure of the attraction of the English club game that a team such as Chelsea, who have reached this stage for the first time, could select eight players who have already played in a Champions League final - six of which finished

on the winning side.

Those players have all been signed in the last five years, and signed because of the reputations they built up at previous clubs.

Of United's quintet of stars to have played in this match, only Patrice Evra hasn't won it, although goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar finished on the winning and losing sides for Ajax in successive seasons - 1995 and 1996.

His appearances were the first of any of the 13 players with United pair Giggs and Neville next in 1999.

Chelsea's French forward Nicolas Anelka played for Real Madrid in their 3-0 victory over Valencia in 2000 while United's Owen Hargreaves was part of the Bayern Munich team that beat Valencia on penalties the next year.

Chelsea duo Michael Ballack and Claude Makelele appeared on opposite sides in 2002 with the German's Bayer Leverkusen beaten 2-1 by the Frenchman's Madrid.

A year after that Andrei Shevchenko was part of the AC Milan team that beat Juventus in the final and he also appeared on the losing side in 2005 against Liverpool - alongside Van der Sar he

is the only player of the 13 to have played in two finals.

Evra played against both Ricardo Carvalho and Paulo Ferreira in the 2004 final when the Portuguese pair enjoyed Porto's 3-0 defeat of Monaco.

The last ones of the group to play in the final were Chelsea full-backs Juliano Belletti and Ashley Cole, who were on opposite sides in 2006 when Barcelona beat Arsenal. Belletti actually notched the winner after coming on as a substitute.

In reality, though, Shevchenko, Neville, Belletti and Ferreira are almost certain not to start while Hargreaves might not, depending on the formation United boss Sir Alex Ferguson opts for.

Anelka is also likely to start on the bench as Chelsea manager Avram Grant favours Didier Drogha up front on his own, while Giggs could play second fiddle to Korean Park Ji-Sung.

That means there may only be as few as six of the 13 playing from the start.

But whatever happens, neither side could justifiably claim to lack experience on club football's highest stage.

## Raul best in Spain

AFP, Madrid

Daily Spanish sports newspaper Marca on Monday awarded Real Madrid captain Raul Gonzalez, the club's top scorer this season with 18 goals, its Di Stefano prize for best player of the 2007-09 season.

The prize is named after Real Madrid's iconic former striker Alfredo Di Stefano who announced the winner of the trophy at a ceremony in Madrid.

"He had a good campaign and he deserves it," the 81-year-old said.

Raul's 18 goals helped Real Madrid clinch its second straight league title and is the 31-year-old's best league tally in seven years.

Spain coach Luis Aragones on Saturday left Raul out of his 23-man squad for Euro 2008 as had been widely expected despite pressure to recall the player.

Raul is the country's leading scorer with 44 goals in 102 international matches but he has not played for Spain since a 3-2 qualifying loss at Northern Ireland in September 2006.

A two-time European Player of the Year, Argentinian-born Di Stefano scored a total of 418 goals in 510 games in all tournaments for Real Madrid.

## Pompey stars' medals stolen

AFP, Portsmouth

Portsmouth defender Glen Johnson and teammate Jamie Ashdown had their FA Cup winners' medals stolen in the aftermath of the club's victory celebrations.

Johnson and substitute goalkeeper Ashdown discovered the medals had been pinched when they returned to the team's Berkshire hotel after Portsmouth's parade through the city on Sunday.

"I'm devastated," Johnson said. "This was the highlight of my career. You can't imagine how much the medal means to me."

"It is something you want to treasure for your whole life and show your kids and grandkids."

"We checked out of the room on Sunday morning and left our bags in a safe place to collect them after the parade. But when I got back to the hotel and checked to look at my medal it was gone."

"I'm just hoping that if I can't get it back the FA might consider making a replica for me."

Meanwhile Peter Enckelman, the Cardiff goalkeeper whose mistake allowed Nwankwo Kanu to score Portsmouth's Wembley winner, is now without a club after being released by Blackburn.

It's not all bad news for Enckelman though as the Finn has been offered a contract by Cardiff despite his Cup final blunder.

## Barton gets six months in jail

REUTERS, London

Newcastle United midfielder Joey Barton was jailed on Tuesday for six months after admitting to beating up a teenager during a night out.

The sentence was handed down at Liverpool Crown Court, where the 25-year-old admitted charges of affray and assault occasioning actual bodily harm, stemming from an early morning fight in Liverpool in December.

Premier League Newcastle issued a short statement on their Web site (www.nufc.co.uk) although it remains to be seen how they will deal with Barton's latest setback.

"Newcastle United notes the sentence passed to Joey Barton at Liverpool Crown Court today," the statement said.

"The club is considering the verdict and will make no further comment at this stage."

Barton's brother, Andrew Barton, also admitted assault occasioning actual bodily harm, and a third defendant, Nadine Wilson, 27, pleaded guilty to affray and common assault.

Barton had pleaded guilty last month but the court initially imposed an order preventing details being published after the player's lawyers argued it could prejudice a jury in a separate assault trial he faces in Manchester.

The court lifted the reporting restrictions on Tuesday after hearing arguments from media organisations that information about Barton's history of bad behaviour was in the public domain.

In the Manchester case, he is due to stand trial accused of assaulting his former Manchester City team mate Ousmane Dabo in a training ground incident in May last year that effectively ended his career with the club. He has pleaded not guilty.

Barton, who has one England cap, joined Newcastle United for 5.8 million pounds (\$11.33 million) in July 2007.



Portugal's Brazilian coach Luiz Felipe Scolari (L) jogs with striker Nuno Gomes (C) and midfielder Deco during their training session at the Montebelo Golf Course yesterday.

# Portuguese search for that elusive crown

AFP, Lisbon



EURO 2008 Austria-Switzerland

It would be somewhat ironic were Portugal to at last win a senior trophy with their so called 'golden generation' having now retired without a winners' medal around their necks.

For years Luis Figo, Rui Costa, Paolo Sousa and Pedro Pauleta plugged away fruitlessly trying to transform their super achievements as junior players into something at senior level - going out in the Euro 2000 and 2006 World Cup semi-finals and losing to Greece in the Euro 2008 final proving the closest they came to the elusive prize.

Their squad this time round may be less experienced and boast less familiar names but in Cristiano Ronaldo they possess probably the best player in the world at the moment and a player capable of turning a match in a second.

The one concern will be that it will be too much pressure on a player that is still only 23 and that

the kickings that he gets in the Premiership for Manchester United - which has driven manager Sir Alex Ferguson to distraction - will only be exacerbated at the championships and with the hardbitten Turks up first coach Luiz Felipe Scolari will be praying he comes through unscathed.

Any such treatment from the Turks could see an equally fiery face to face between the two coaches as Scolari is not one to shirk a confrontation and his Turkish counterpart Fatih Terim is more than a match.

"According to me, Ronaldo is the best player in the world," said 'Big Phil', who is certainly not a man to be argued with.

"And I hope that he will not just be the best with Manchester United, but also with the national side during Euro."

"Ronaldo has come on a lot as a not only a player, but also and especially as a human being."

"However, the national side is not just dependant on Cristiano Ronaldo. If that was the case it would hardly be worth playing in the finals," added Scolari, who gave Ronaldo his first cap back in 2003.

Scolari has a case in point as the midfield will still boast the talents of the experienced Deco, who will be keen to set aside memories of a desperately disappointing campaign with Barcelona, and Benfica's Petit, though the Brazilian coach found it possible to leave out Inter Milan's Maniche.

Up front Scolari can still count on the vastly experienced Nuno Gomes, who goes back the whole way to Euro 2000, Simao Sabrosa, who had an excellent season with Atletico Madrid and Helder Postiga, so they should be able to take some of the pressure off Ronaldo.

In defence too Scolari will be looking to Ricardo Carvalho to marshal the back four and the coach is confident that his squad of 2008 will be capable of making as strong an impression as the one of 2004.

"We have as good a chance as we did in 2004," claimed Scolari, who guided Brazil to the 2002 World Cup title.

"This time round, the team is younger and less experienced, but with good morale we can reach the final," added Scolari.

## Degan joins Liverpool

AFP, London

Swiss international right-back Philipp Degan will join Liverpool on a free transfer as the first move in coach Rafael Benitez' remodeling of his under-achieving side.

The 25-year-old will leave Borussia Dortmund for Anfield on July 1 when his contract with the Bundesliga club expires.

The former Basel defender will vie with Alvaro Arbeloa and Steve Finnan for the right-back berth after he returns from Euro 2008.

Benitez told the Liverpool website: "Philipp is still young but has gained great experience from playing in the Bundesliga with Borussia Dortmund and on the international stage with Switzerland."

"He also played in the Champions League during his time with Basel and so is used to top-level football."

"He is an offensive player with great energy and a winning mentality."

"His strength is going forward and I am confident he will be prove to be a quality addition to our squad."

Degan expressed his delight at joining one of the giants of European football.

"When I received the offer from Liverpool, there was no doubt I would accept it," he said.

"They are one of the biggest clubs in the world and I am looking forward to the challenge of establishing myself there and playing in the best league there is."

## Agent denies Lampard's Inter link

AFP, London

Frank Lampard's agent insists there is no truth in reports the Chelsea midfielder is set to join Inter Milan after the Champions League final.

Reports in Italy claim Lampard, 29, is ready to quit Stamford Bridge rather than extend his contract, which expires in 2009.

Lampard, who is preparing to face Manchester United on Wednesday, has yet to agree a new deal with Chelsea. And Inter, who could be managed by former Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho next season, are keen to sign the England star.

But agent Steve Kutner said: "I don't know why Inter Milan would think this. Nobody has talked to me and I am good friends with the owner, Massimo Moratti."

"I took Paul Ince there, I took Patrick Vieira there - if there was something on, I am sure I would know."

"The situation is that Frank has got a massive match on Wednesday, after which he needs to spend time with his family, because he has not had a real opportunity to do that since his mother died."

"He needs to get away and sort out his personal life and when he has done that we will sit down and talk about his future in football."

"After that, we will talk to Chelsea and that is as far as we have got - there is nothing in the pipeline and I don't know why this has surfaced now."

## Spain promise Euro bonus

AFP, Madrid

If Spain wins the Euro 2008 championship in June, each member of the country's 23-man squad will win a bonus of 214,000 euros (333,000 dollars), sports daily AS reported Tuesday.

If the team does not reach the quarterfinals of the tournament, which will be co-hosted by Austria and Switzerland from June 7-29, each player will only receive a fixed bonus of just 30,000 euros, the newspaper added.

There are five English Premiership players in the squad which Spain coach Luis Aragones named on Saturday: Liverpool's Pepe Reina, Alvaro Arbeloa, Xabi Alonso and Fernando Torres along with Arsenal's Cesc Fabregas.

All the other 18 players in the squad play their football in Spain.

During the 2006 World Cup held in Germany, each Spain player was promised a bonus of 540,000 euros if they won the tournament. Spain missed a place in the quarterfinals after it was defeated 3-1 by France.

Spain are in Group D in Euro 2008 along with Russia, Sweden and defending champions Greece.

The Euro 1964 champions are scheduled to travel to their team base in Neustift, Austria on June 5.

## Terry challenges Ferdinand

AFP, London

Chelsea defender John Terry has vowed to give Rio Ferdinand a week to forget by beating Manchester United in the Champions League final and then reclaiming the England captaincy.

Terry lost the England armband when Fabio Capello opted to rotate the captaincy ahead of next season's World Cup qualifiers.

United centre-back Ferdinand captained England for their last match against France, but Chelsea skipper Terry is determined to win back the honour for next week's friendly against the USA.

"I am disappointed with what has happened. I want the armband and my England place back. Maybe a performance in this final would go a long way to getting those things back," Terry told the Sun.

"But Rio has been different class this year and particularly since he was made captain against France."

"We have seen a world-class player at the top of his game and, as a centre-half looking on, I would say he has been awesome."

"But I want to get out there and prove I am the right man for the England job."

First Terry will turn his attention to leading Chelsea to victory over United in Moscow on Wednesday.

Terry knows how much a first European Cup success would mean to the club he joined as a trainee back in 1997.

"I've seen the changes over the years and I don't think people realise how important this is for Chelsea," he said.

"It means the world to me to be in the final, it is an achievement in itself. But beyond that I want to get my hands on the trophy. I'm desperate to do it."

Whether Ferdinand retains the England captaincy or not, he feels he has already delivered the perfect response to critics who claimed he was wasting his career.

## Sports bars sold out in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

Sports bars across Moscow have reported sell-out bookings ahead of Wednesday's Champions League final as the Russian capital braced for an onslaught of English fans.

Russian football fans have been allotted only a limited number of tickets for the Manchester United versus Chelsea final in Moscow's Luzhniko stadium and many have turned to advance bookings in sports bars to watch the match.

"The last available table was reserved last week," said Nikolai Sedov, deputy chief of one of the most popular sport bars in the city centre.

"Some of our bars reported they were sold out for the May 21 evening already a month ago," said Natalia Sokolova, spokeswoman for Moscow's 'Kruzha' sports bar network, whose establishments are open for business 24 hours a day.

"Our clients usually reserve a table for a company of six people or more."

Meanwhile Manchester United representatives have decided to organise a public relations action in one of the Russian capital's sports bars with Manchester United flags and souvenirs on offer.

About 40,000 English fans are expected in the Russian capital for Wednesday's match in which two English Premiership sides giants will play for this season's European club champions title.

## Gattuso will stay in Milan

AFP, Rome

Italian World Cup winner Gennaro Gattuso scotched any rumours about his quitting AC Milan when he extended his contract with the Serie A giants by three years.

"I will stay here for three more years," the 30-year-old Gattuso told a press conference, just two weeks after having stated that he dreamed of playing in the English Premier League.

German champions Bayern Munich were also reported this month to have offered Gattuso a contract worth six million euros a year to leave AC Milan.

Gattuso has been at AC for nine years and is under contract until 2011.

## Schweinsteiger to extend with Bayern

AFP, Munich

German international Bastian Schweinsteiger looks set to extend his contract with German champions Bayern Munich after holding promising talks with club president Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

The present contract of the 23-year-old - capped 49 times and scorer of 13 goals - runs out in 2009, but Rummenigge expressed his confidence that they would reach an agreement over a new one.

"We have held our first discussions and I am optimistic we are going to find a solution," Rummenigge told the club website.

"He wants to stay and we are also interested in him staying."

Schweinsteiger came through the Bayern youth system and has scored 15 goals in 153 appearances for the senior side, collecting four domestic titles and four German Cups.

Schweinsteiger, who was part of the Germany team that finished third at the 2006 World Cup final, left on Monday for a pre-Euro 2008 training camp in Majorca, Spain, along with the majority of the national squad.

# Argentina leave out Tevez



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Striker Carlos Tevez was left out of the Argentina squad on Monday for next month's friendlies against Mexico and the United States.

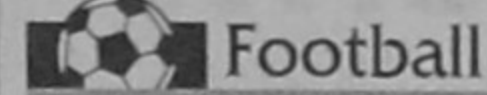
Porto's Lisandro Lopez and Fernando Cavenaghi of Girondins Bordeaux were named as two of the forwards along with Sergio Aguero, Lionel Messi and Julio Cruz.

Manchester United striker Tevez also missed the 2-0 friendly win over Egypt in March, the only match Argentina have played this year.

Tevez's recent international form has been poor and he was sent off on his last appearance, in a World Cup qualifier in Colombia in November, for petulantly kicking an opponent.

Colombia went on to win 2-1. Tevez is suspended for the World Cup qualifier at home to Ecuador in June.

# C'Ron not for sale



AFP, Manchester

Cristiano Ronaldo will not be allowed to leave Manchester United at any price according to the club's chief executive David Gill.

Ronaldo has been repeatedly linked with a 100 million pounds (120 million euros) move to Real Madrid over the last year and the Portugal winger recently refused to rule out the possibility of a switch to Spain in the future.

But Gill is adamant Ronaldo will see out his contract at Old Trafford.

"Without doubt we are. He's got four more years (on his contract) until 2012, he's been with us for five years and we're sure he'll be with us for many years to come," Gill said.

"He's clearly one of the best players in the world and he's at a great club, winning trophies."

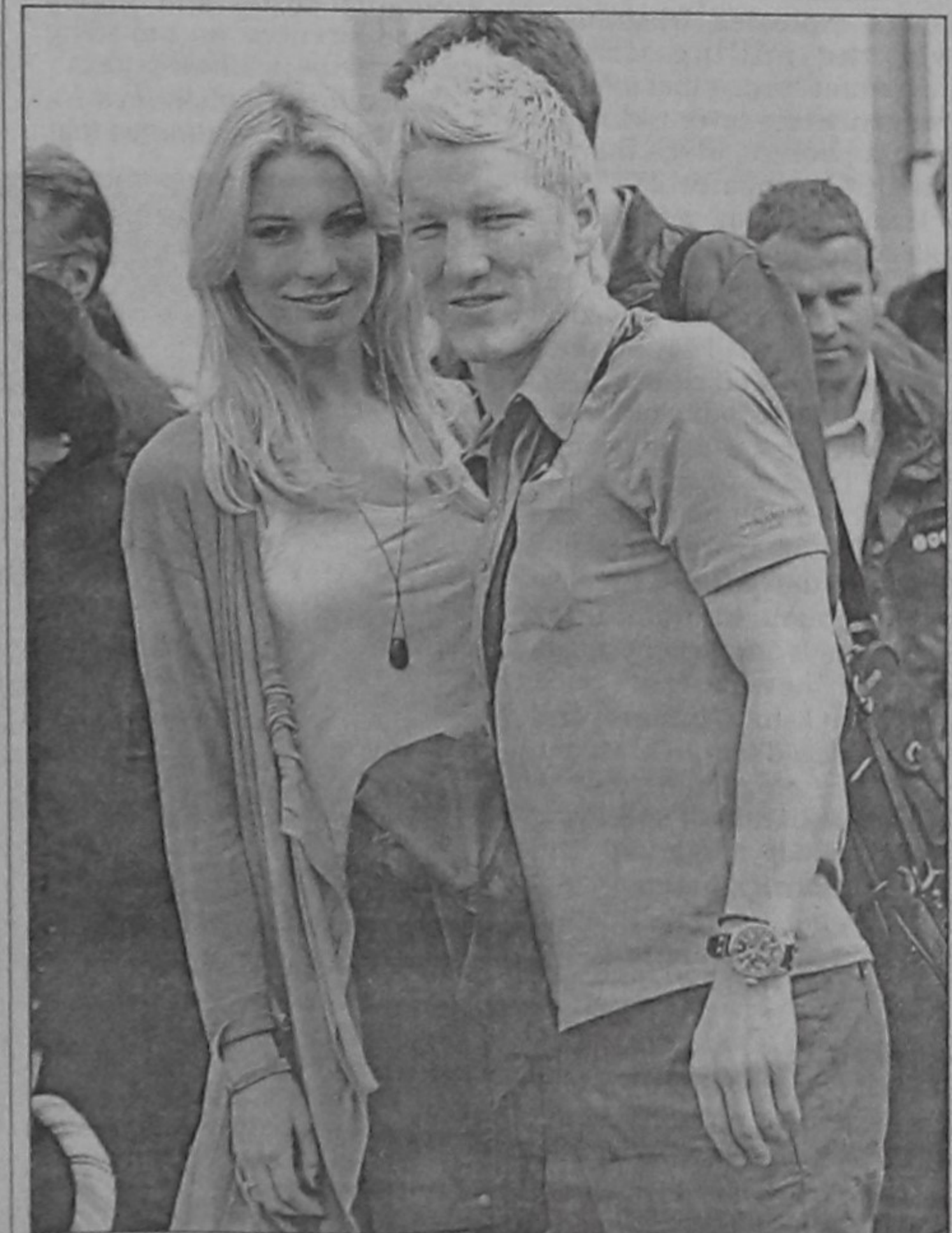
"He enjoys it immensely here, you can tell that when you speak to him privately. Why would he want to leave?"

"We have no intention of letting him go, we will make sure that he's very happy here, as we do with all our top players."

Reports on Tuesday claimed United have debts of around 764 million pounds but Gill doesn't believe that will force them to cash in on their prize asset.

"Manchester United is not a club that sells its main assets," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

"In order to service our debts we need a very successful team on the pitch, and you don't achieve that by selling Cristiano Ronaldo."



German midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger (R) and his girlfriend, Model Sarah Brandner, are seen upon the arrival of the national team in Palma de Mallorca on Monday.