

Kaka not for sale

AFP, London

AC Milan on Saturday dismissed reports that their Brazilian star Kaka is set to move to English Premier League side Chelsea on a world-record transfer worth 80 million pounds (100 million euros, 160 million dollars).

The Italian club signed his international teammate Ronaldinho on Wednesday despite reported financial difficulties, and Kaka's personal assistant Diogo Kotscho claimed all parties involved now want the deal to go through.

"Real Madrid offered 90 million euros last summer and Milan did not even think about the bid," Kotscho told The Guardian.

"This time is different. This is the first time we feel that a deal will definitely happen."

"Because of the situation Milan are in at the moment, the deal is good for all parties involved."

The move would represent a significant increase in Kaka's salary, on top of the 10 percent transfer fee that goes straight to the player anyway - some 15 million euros.

"Chelsea are the club to be at right now. They are building a team to win everything."

But AC Milan said in a statement on Saturday: "Regarding the comments, Milan director of communications Vittorio Mentana reiterates that Kaka is absolutely not for sale."

If he moved the FIFA World Player of the Year would be reunited with manager Luiz Felipe Scolari who handed him a Brazil debut in 2002 and then included him in the squad that went on to win the World Cup that year.

Kaka, 26, is under contract with Milan until 2012.

But he was irritated by the club's refusal to let him play for Brazil in the Olympics, followed by their agreement to let Ronaldinho go to Beijing.

Bastian wants new deal

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's international midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger on Friday said he was determined to sign a new deal with the German first division champions.

The 23-year-old, who has been in negotiations with the club's management since the end of last season, was speaking as he returned for his first training session under new coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"My first choice will be Bayern. Bayern is my home," said Schweinsteiger, who came through the club's youth ranks, and has scored 15 goals since making his first-team debut in 2002.

The player had a memorable Euro 2008, netting twice as Germany progressed to the final where they were beaten by Spain.

"I showed what I was capable of during Euro 2008," he said. "But I don't want to talk too much about this tournament."

Bayern won the league and cup double last season and are hoping to make a big impression in the Champions League, which they last won in 2001.

Zaragoza loan Matuzalem to Lazio

AFP, Madrid

Real Zaragoza have agreed to loan their Brazilian midfielder Francelino Matuzalem to Italian side Lazio for one season, the Spanish club said Friday.

"Real Zaragoza have reached an agreement for the season-long loan to Lazio of Francelino Matuzalem. The player will be in Rome to sign an agreement with the Italian club," it said in a statement on its website.

The 28-year-old joined Zaragoza from Ukrainian side Shakhtar Donetsk last year but had been certain to leave after the Spanish side were relegated.

Matuzalem played for Italian sides Brescia, Napoli, Parma and Piacenza before joining Shakhtar in 2004.

PSG to appeal League Cup ban

AFP, Paris

Top French side Paris St Germain on Friday said they would appeal a Professional Football League (LFP) ruling banning the club from defending its League Cup title, according to the club's website.

In April the LFP handed down the decision after PSG fans displayed a controversial banner during their League Cup final victory over Lens.

During the match - attended by President Nicolas Sarkozy - Parisian fans were forced to remove the 25-metre banner which said that people in the northeast of the country were all "paedophiles, unemployed, inbred".

Deco likes it tough

AFP, Cobham

Luiz Felipe Scolari may have been charged with restoring some King's Road swagger to Chelsea, but old habits clearly die hard for the Brazilian.

Scolari's penchant for tough training sessions brought the World Cup to his native country and banished Portugal's flaky reputation on the international stage, so there have been few complaints from Chelsea's millionaire superstars during a rigorous pre-season at the club's plush Surrey headquarters.

The west Londoners have been training twice daily under Scolari's watchful eye since he began work in early July and are about to embark on an arduous two-and-a-half week tour of China, Malaysia and Russia, which begins on Sunday.

For Deco, the club's new eight million pounds (10 million euros) signing, there is nothing surprising about Scolari's punishing schedules. The Portuguese playmaker experienced them at first hand during the 59-year-old's spell as Portugal head coach, although they are a far cry from the approach taken at his former club, Barcelona.

At Camp Nou, training was famously - or perhaps notoriously -

relaxed. Frank Rijkaard, the club's former head coach, was criticised by sections of the Catalan press for a laid-back approach which, they claimed, was reflected in the club's failure to win a trophy last season.

Deco, for his part, prefers Scolari's more intense style. "I have noticed that we are training more here which I like," he said.

"We train in the mornings and in the afternoons as well and we spend more time together to recover from the sessions. That helps us get on more as players because we are spending time together as a group."

"During training, the manager is harder than he normally is. He is a very friendly, affectionate guy but when he works he takes it very seriously. He wants players to be dedicated - not playing around - so you have to work hard and that is fine for everyone."

Deco has more reason than most for craving success at Stamford Bridge this season.

The 29-year-old endured a frustrating campaign at Barca last year, with his attitude and aptitude publicly questioned by president Joan Laporta just prior to his departure, although he was not alone. Ronaldinho was also ostracised, with the Brazilian subsequently joining AC Milan.

"I'm pleased that Ronnie found the best solution for him because it was important that he left

Barcelona," Deco added. "I must say that I think they were very unfair to him. For me, Ronnie was the best player Barcelona ever had. Now he has joined a club which will give him what he needs."

"As for me, Chelsea is the best place for me to come. It is great that there are so many good players at the club, because that is what I am used to."

"The times I have played against Chelsea in the past have always been very hard, so I know that we can win the Champions League and the Premier League again."

Chelsea's chances of doing that rest not just on Scolari's ability to attract more of world football's top talents to Stamford Bridge, but also keeping the ones already on the pay-roll.

Deco appealed to the club's powerbrokers to keep Frank Lampard during his official unveiling on Friday and Didier Drogba, also linked with a move to the continent, was also singled out for praise.

"Drogba is one of the best centre-forwards in the world and all the big clubs want players like him," Deco said. "I don't know whether he will stay but I want him to stay and I would love to play with him because he is a fantastic player."

"To win the Champions League, you need players like Drogba. So I am not surprised that all the clubs are trying to get him out of Chelsea."

Hard times for Eto'o

INTERNET, undated

Saturday threatened to be one of the most difficult days in the up-and-down career of Samuel Eto'o. The Cameroon hitman's holidays are over and he was due to return to Barcelona's Camp Nou - to be officially told that he is not wanted.

Despite being Barca's top scorer in the past four seasons - banging in 107 goals since joining from Mallorca in 2004 - and despite having led the Catalans to two Spanish league and two Champions League titles, Eto'o will be told to pack his bags.

Barca have a history of sending their megastars packing after a few seasons. On Tuesday, it was the turn of Ronaldinho, sold off cheaply to AC Milan.

Three weeks ago Deco was unceremoniously packed off to Chelsea.

Now comes the turn of Eto'o. New coach Josep Guardiola has made it clear that the "Lion of Cameroon" is another player he wants to see the back off.

Ronaldinho, Deco and Eto'o are being held to blame - and not just by Guardiola - for Barca's last two lethargic, chaotic and trophy-less seasons.

In particular, Deco and Eto'o have become unpopular with the "cule" fans for having allegedly picked up deliberate yellow cards in order to miss a 4-1 humiliation away to champions Real Madrid in May.

Ronaldinho, for his part, missed the misery in Madrid due to an injury that several directors believe to have been invented.

On Saturday Eto'o, 27, was to be told by Guardiola that he was not wanted. Then technical secretary Txiki Begiristain was to ask him what offers he has received from other clubs.

The answer, somewhat surprisingly, is: very few.

None of Europe's major clubs seem particularly interested in the explosive striker, partly because of the hard-to-handle reputation that he has picked up.

He was at daggers drawn with Ronaldinho in the past two seasons, infamously called former coach Frank Rijkaard "a very bad person" - and several times has threatened to walk off the field after

allegedly receiving racist abuse at away games.

Bizarrely, Eto'o spent most of last week in Tashkent, talking about "an excellent offer" he had received from Uzbek champions PFC Kuruvchi.

The prospect of Eto'o moving from La Liga to Uzbekistan has been greeted with astonishment and ridicule in the Spanish media.

His agent, Jose Maria Mesalles, is working hard to explore more realistic possibilities.

Manchester City, who missed out on Ronaldinho, might be interested in Eto'o. The Catalan media on Saturday was suggesting a swap for Tottenham's Dimitar Berbatov.

A similar swap for Arsenal's Emmanuel Adebayor seems to have died the same as the possibility of trading Eto'o for Chelsea's Florent Malouda or Didier Drogba.

Two years ago - after scoring for Barca in their Champions League final triumph against Arsenal - Eto'o was one of Planet Football's most coveted strikers.

Now few major clubs seem prepared to splash out for the little tinderbox.

What a difference two years can make in modern football.



Chelsea midfielder Deco (R) and manager Luiz Felipe Scolari display a team jersey during a press conference at their training ground in Cobham on Friday.

Totti hints at return

REUTERS, Rome

Francesco Totti is not ruling out a return to the Italian national team, the AS Roma captain said.

The 31-year-old, who picked up a World Cup winners' medal in 2006, retired from international soccer last year saying his body was no longer up to playing for both club and country.

However, the return to the Azzurri dugout of Marcello Lippi, with whom Totti said he had a "great relationship", raised hopes the player may return.

"If I'm well and I don't have problems, it will be possible to address this issue in six months or a year," Totti, who missed the end of last season with a knee injury, told Saturday's La Gazzetta dello Sport.

On the domestic front, Totti said Roma, runners-up in Serie A last season, need to make two major signings in the close season if they are to compete with Inter Milan, AC Milan and Juventus for the title.

He still seems to bear a grudge against Christian Poulsen, Juve's latest signing, after being banned for three matches for spitting at the Denmark midfielder during a Euro 2004 group game.

Totti said he had been provoked and he was not impressed by Poulsen's recent offer to shake his hand.

"It's easy to talk now," he said. "He could have come and told the truth at the hearing the day after. I don't think he adds anything (to Juve) at the technical level."

Rosicky hopes for Sept return

AFP, Prague

Czech and Arsenal midfielder star Tomas Rosicky insisted Saturday he hopes to be recovered from a knee operation and playing again in September.

"I know I'll miss the start of the club season. According to plans I should be back on the field in September," Rosicky told Czech daily Sport.

The Czech captain underwent an operation three weeks ago for an injury which has prevented him playing since the end of January and forced him to miss the European Championships.

Rosicky said he did not want to speculate whether he would be fit for the first 2010 World Cup qualifier against Northern Ireland on September 10.

Drogba set for showdown

INTERNET, undated

Didier Drogba will hold showdown talks with Chelsea after the club rejected Barcelona's offer of a swap deal involving Samuel Eto'o.

The Ivory Coast striker was chasing a move to Milan at the beginning of the summer but appeared to be having second thoughts following the arrival at Chelsea of Luiz Felipe Scolari, reports The Sun.

New Barca coach Josep Guardiola is understood to have told Eto'o he has no future at the Nou Camp and the Catalans are desperate to get rid of him.

The La Liga outfit were hoping Scolari would be interested in a swap deal but the Brazilian immediately rejected the idea.

Drogba has three years remaining on his contract and has been battling a knee injury for more than a year.

However Barca were thought to be willing to offer the 30-year-old a two-year contract at £103,000 a week. He currently earns £84,000 per week at Stamford Bridge.

Blues slam racism charge

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea have reacted with fury to an FA racism charge levelled against groundsman Steve Bethell.

The FA action has been brought after a three-month inquiry into events which occurred after Chelsea's controversial win over Manchester United at Stamford Bridge on April 26.

During the visitors' warm-down after a Premier League defeat cemented by Michael Ballack's contentious late penalty, Evra and Bethell clashed following a verbal exchange and had to be pulled apart.

There was an immediate accusation from the United camp that Evra has been the subject of racist abuse.

And while the FA have charged Evra and Bethell with improper conduct, they have also claimed the Chelsea man used "abusive language aggravated by reference to nationality/race."

As a player, Evra - a France international who was born in Senegal - is facing the possibility of a fine or suspension for his part in the incident, but the punishments available

to Bethell are not so clear-cut. However the Blues hit back in a statement on Friday night.

It read: "We believe there is no foundation whatsoever to claims that the incident which occurred after the Manchester United match on April 26 involved comments based on nationality or race, which has led to an FA charge against one of our employees."

"Chelsea FC condemn all forms of discrimination in football and society."

"Such allegations against our club are extremely serious and Chelsea will not be making any further comment until we have assessed all the implications of the charge."

Soho Square officials have conducted an exhaustive inquiry using various forms of evidence - and appear sure of their ground ahead of what is sure to be an explosive hearing at a date which is yet to be agreed.

An FA statement read: "The charges are the result of a thorough investigation conducted by the FA over the last three months."

"In bringing the charges, the FA used video evidence, CCTV footage and various witness statements from individuals present."

With senior officials from both

clubs accompanying their teams on pre-season tours to the Far East in Chelsea's case and South Africa for Manchester United, it may take some time for the FA to confirm a hearing date - even though Evra and Bethell remain in the UK.

As expected, Rio Ferdinand has escaped sanction, although he has been warned about his future conduct after accidentally striking a member of the Chelsea staff with a door he kicked in anger as he made his way off the field.

Ferdinand has since apologised and sent the female staff member a bunch of flowers.

There had been some suggestion earlier this week that the England defender was facing a four-match ban which could put his hopes of captaining the Three Lions under new coach Fabio Capello at risk.

However, those worries were instantly rejected by the FA, who insisted Ferdinand's place in the squad to face the Czech Republic on August 20 - before which Capello will name his new skipper - was not under threat.

And with the fear of a charge also proving unfounded, Ferdinand will be available for United's opening Premier League game against Newcastle on August 17.

Spurs blast Fergie

AFP, London

Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy on Friday described the conduct of Manchester United and Liverpool as "disgraceful" in their respective pursuits of Dimitar Berbatov and Robbie Keane.

A furious Levy claimed his Premier League rivals have been "systematically been working to prise the players away from us."

United boss Ferguson confirmed earlier Friday that United, who have been infuriated by Real Madrid's public pursuit of Cristiano Ronaldo this summer, have made a bid for Berbatov and that he eventually expects the deal to go through.

Spurs have also been angered by the comments of Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez, who went public last week by revealing Republic of Ireland captain Keane as a target for the Reds.

Levy issued the following lengthy statement on his club's official website, www.tottenhamhotspur.com: "Today's public comments by Manchester United's manager, announcing that he has made an offer for Dimitar and is confident that the deal will go through with time working in their favour, is a blatant example of sheer arrogance and interference with one of our players."

"It is also probably one of the worst offences by any manager in the Premier League to date and is unbelievably hypocritical given his recent comments in respect of Cristiano Ronaldo and Real Madrid."

"This comes after a series of events, dating back to last summer, which have shown Manchester United to be in breach of Premier League rules."

"As a result, we have today made an official complaint to the Premier League about the conduct of Manchester United."

"Benitez made similar comments in respect of Robbie recently and we made an official complaint to the Premier League about the conduct of Liverpool earlier this

website, www.tottenhamhotspur.com: "Today's public comments by Manchester United's manager, announcing that he has made an offer for Dimitar and is confident that the deal will go through with time working in their favour, is a blatant example of sheer arrogance and interference with one of our players."

"The behaviour of both clubs has been disgraceful. We told both clubs very early on that we had no interest in selling Robbie or Dimitar, respectively, and that they should refrain from pursuing the player."

"Both clubs arrogantly chose to ignore this request and we now have evidence that both clubs have systematically been working to prise the players away from us, outside of Premier League rules of conduct."

"Our subsequent position has been severely compromised by both clubs making their intentions widely known and indeed making contact with the players and their agents, without the club's permission."

Benitez and Spurs have clashed before, in March 2006, when the Liverpool boss claimed Spurs were "desperate" to sell Jermain Defoe and take Djibril Cisse.

Later Friday, United responded to Tottenham's claims.

A spokesman said: "We are aware of the allegation and will cooperate with the Premier League as necessary."

Iran angry over pullout

AFP, Tehran

The Iranian Football Federation on Friday said that it will complain to football world governing body FIFA over Egypt's decision to cancel a friendly match because of a controversial film.

"If the game gets cancelled then we will lodge a complaint to FIFA," the head of Iran's Football Federation, Ali Kafashian was quoted as saying by the state run television news website.

"This is a political issue and we will mention to FIFA that the Egyptians are mixing political issues with sports."

Iranian coach Ali Daei told the ISNA news agency: "Whether we like it or not sport has become intertwined with politics and sport is being used as an instrument in the hands of politicians."

The Egyptian Football Association said on Friday that the match, scheduled for August 20 in the United Arab Emirates, had been cancelled due to tensions over an Iranian film on the assassination of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat.

The film, entitled "Assassination of a Pharaoh", says Sadat was killed for signing the 1978 Camp David Accords that led to a 1979 peace treaty with Israel, the first by an Arab country.

"We have decided to cancel the match because of tensions in relations" between Cairo and Tehran following the airing of the documentary on the 1981 assassination, federation president Samir Zaher said.

"We have been in contact with the (Egyptian) foreign ministry during the last 10 days regarding the situation and we finally decided to cancel the match so it did not provoke in one way or another, further tensions," he said.

Diplomatic ties between Egypt

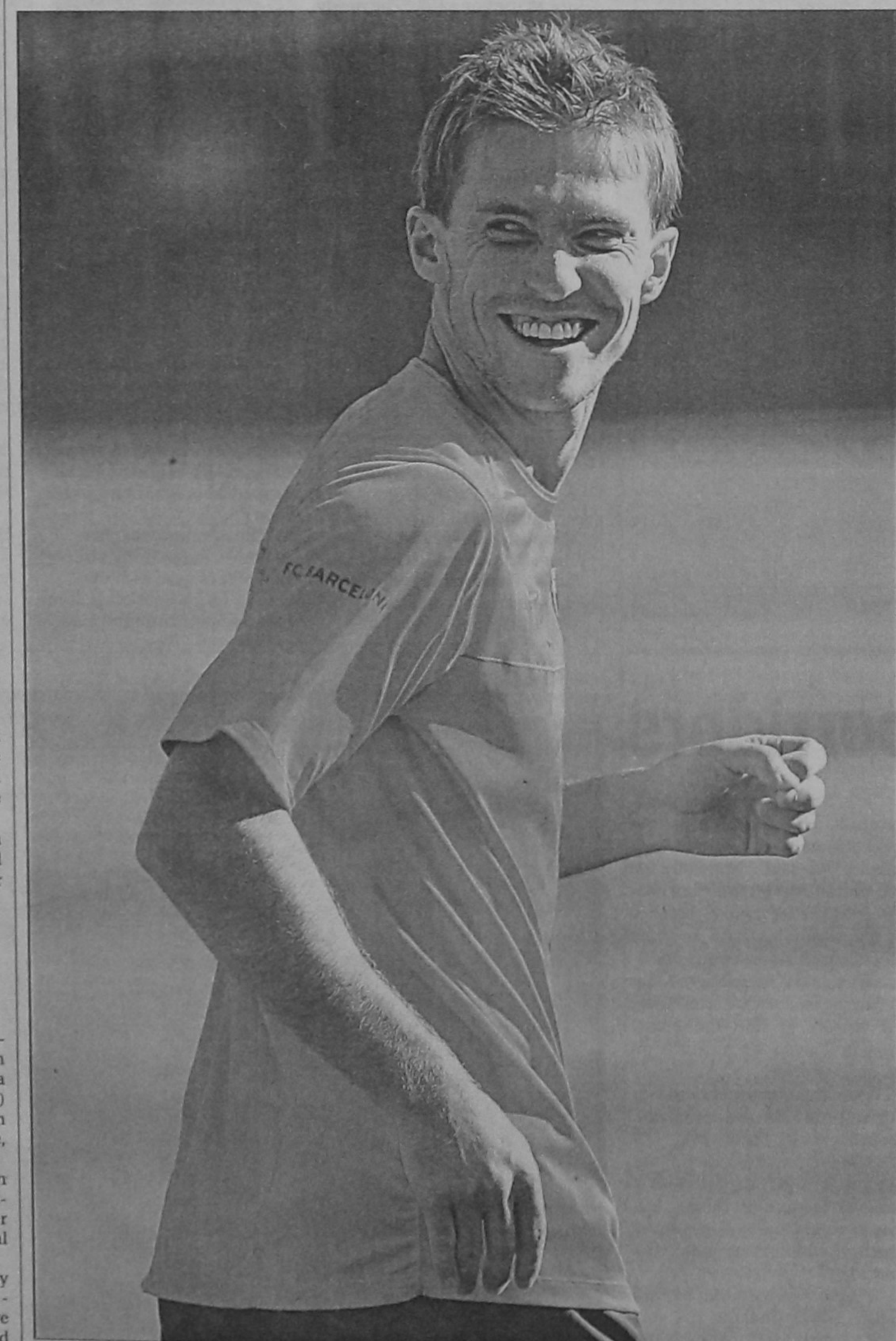
and Iran were severed in 1980, a year after the Islamic revolution, in protest at Egypt's recognition of Israel, its hosting of the deposed shah and its support for Iraq during its 1980-1988 war with Iran.

Relations have recently warmed, with both countries signalling a willingness to restore ties.

This is the second blow to Iran's national squad after English outfit Charlton Athletic also cancelled a planned match against them in Spain.

Iran's national side has been looking for top-quality opposition for friendlies to prepare for the final stage of Asian qualification for the 2010 World Cup.

Iran was drawn into Group B in the final round of World Cup qualifiers along side Korea Republic, Saudi Arabia, North Korea and UAE. Iran will begin its campaign against Saudi Arabia away on September 6.



Barcelona's Belarusian midfielder Alexander Hleb smiles during a training session at the Mini Stadium in Barcelona on Friday.