

Real, Chelsea still want Kaka

INTERNET, undated

Kaka is happy at AC Milan and in no hurry to leave, according to the player's agent.

The Brazil playmaker has been strongly linked with a move to Chelsea, but the Rossoneri have turned down all offers for their star man.

And Gaetano Paolillo insists his client is content at the San Siro, where he is under contract until 2013.

"Kaka has always been happy at Milan and he still is," he said.

"He has a special feeling with the fans and with everyone. His family is happy at Milan."

Last season, Spanish champions Real Madrid made a bid for the 26-year-old but their efforts were rebuffed. They revived their interest again this year but with the same result.

Paolillo is not surprised by the interest shown in Kaka by top European clubs.

"It's normal that every year big clubs like Chelsea and Real Madrid make offers to sign key players like Kaka," he added.

"When (Chelsea owner Roman) Abramovich's offer came to light, Real contacted us to say that if the player was up for sale they would be interested as well."

Paolillo has not ruled out the possibility of Kaka playing for Chelsea one day but believes that all depends on Milan's intentions.

"(Chelsea coach Luiz Felipe) Scolari has infinite affection for Kaka but regardless of this, for Abramovich, Kaka is in his dream," said Paolillo.

"It will depend on Milan. If (AC Milan owner Silvio) Berlusconi wants to keep him at Milan it will be difficult for Kaka to leave."

"If a player is happy he remains in a squad."

Schuster's dig at C'Ron pursuit

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster is concerned that his club's obsession with signing Cristiano Ronaldo could cause them to miss out on buying other players.

"As you all know at this club we have been obsessed with signing a player whose name I can't quite remember at the moment," Schuster told reporters at the club's pre-season training base in Austria on Saturday.

"When you start something like this you know that if you don't sort it out quickly then it might be too late to sign another player."

"We have had plans in place for several months ready for any movement, for any solution, but the truth is that as time passes you are running the risk that Plan B might have become a little difficult."

Although he said Ronaldo would fit perfectly into the Real Madrid squad, Schuster admitted that he understood manager Alex Ferguson's reluctance to let the Portugal winger leave Manchester United.

"They tell me he is a team player and he has proved that at Manchester.... I don't think he would have any problems in adapting to play with us."

"I'm absolutely certain that if I was in his (Ferguson's) position I would do exactly the same. I wouldn't like anyone to take a player like him from me even if I had won the league and the Champions League."

"He is the sort of player that no one wants to lose and for me the way in which the Manchester United manager is defending himself is perfect."

When asked if the club's alternative plans involved Valencia's Spanish international striker David Villa, Schuster replied: "I don't want to give any names.... All I can say is that they are attacking players."

10 fans hurt in Budapest riots

AFP, Budapest

At least 10 people were injured Saturday when supporters of Budapest football club Honved clashed with fans of Austria's Sturm Graz during a match in the Hungarian capital.

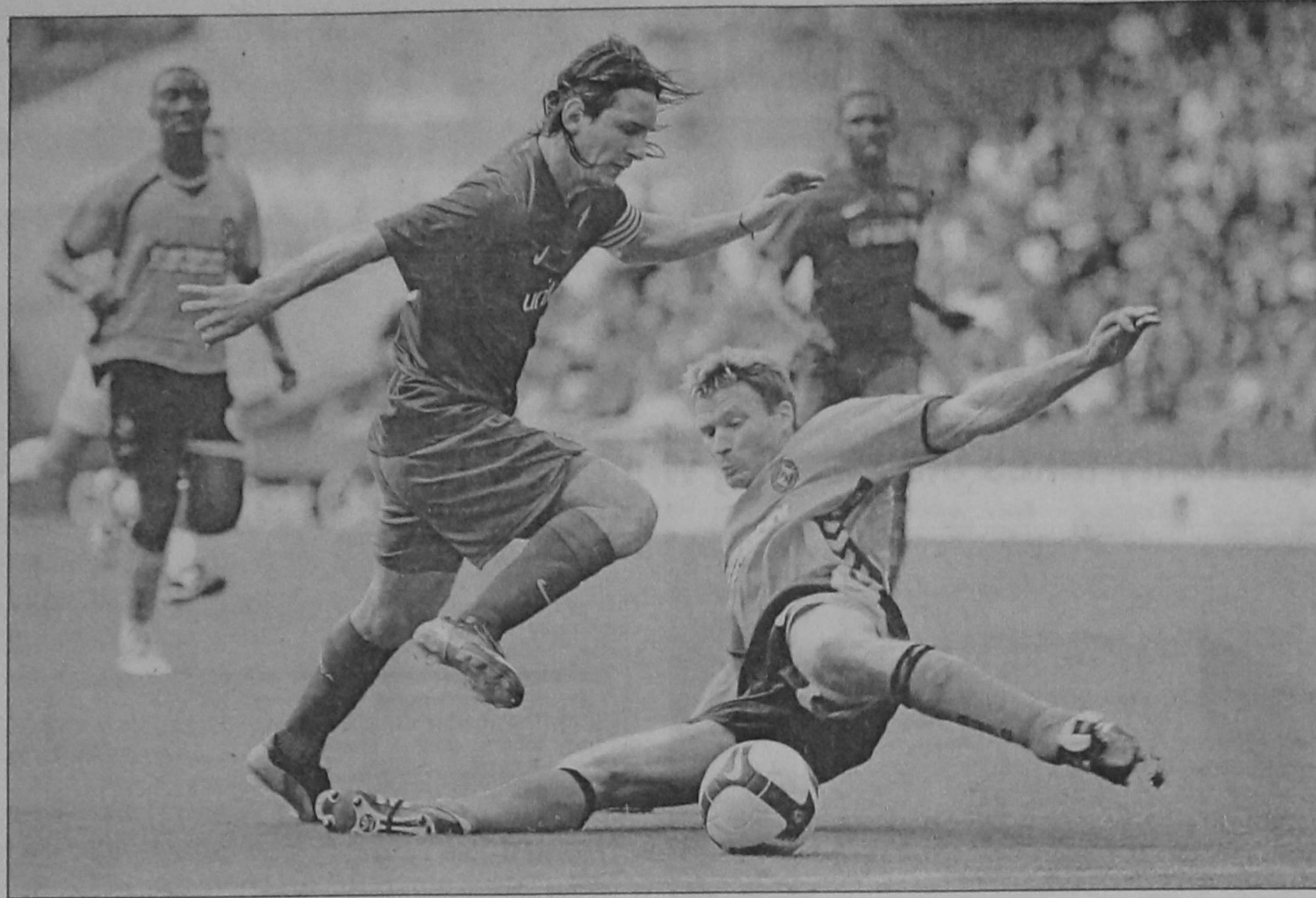
While Sturm Graz qualified for the Intertoto Cup during the 3rd round after winning 0-0, and then 2-1 late Saturday in Budapest, rival supporters clashed throughout the day. Police detained an Austrian man after he damaged a police car.

During the match, Austrian supporters threw smoke bombs in the stadium where the two clubs faced off.

Sturm Graz chief Hans Rinner said he regretted the use of the devices by supporters of his club, but added Honved Budapest stewards had "clamped down brutally" on thousands of Austrians.

Some stewards used batons and ripped out seats only to throw them at Austrian supporters, he added.

About 10 Graz supporters were taken to hospital, he said.



Barcelona star Lionel Messi skips a tackle from Dundee United's Paul Dixon (R) during a friendly match at the Tannadice Stadium in Dundee on Saturday.

In defence of smoking

Football

THE OBSERVER

Pictured lolling in a swimming pool during his honeymoon in June, Wayne Rooney looked like many young Englishmen abroad: high-street Bermudas, lobster tan, can of fizz, cigarette. This Englishman is, however, the country's most talented footballer, and the cigarette caused a rumpus. Pundits grumbled their disappointment and anticipated the hairdryer treatment from his manager. Other commentators - the smokers, at a guess - came to Rooney's defence. There was little agreement on how the occasional stick might affect his football.

And so many of the finest sportsmen - Eddie Crutch, Diego Maradona, Johnnie Markey, Keke Rosberg, James Hunt, Ian Botham, Shane Warne - have been committed puffery. Bobby Charlton smoked at half-time in the World Cup final; Serge Blanco put away 40 per cent while winning two rugby grand slams with France. In the past 18 months, footballer Dimitar Berbatov, tennis player David Ferrer and champion jockey Seb Sanders have all come out (or been outed) as smokers. "To some extent you can overcome smoking's adverse effects by heavy training," says Professor Martin Jarvis, a clinical psychologist at UCL who is an expert on smoking. "The nasty

things from tobacco smoke are not going to impact immediately on your capacity to run, jump and so on. They will accumulate over time, though, and creep up one day." It happened to Cruyff - he smoked constantly as a player and a manager, until a double heart bypass in 1991.

It is in the short term that the effects of cigarettes on athletic performance are harder to assess. "A sportsman highly reliant on their fitness would clearly be stupid to smoke," says Dr Keith Prowse, chairman of the British Lung Foundation. "But in the short term, smoking won't do much beyond irritate the nose and throat." According to Jarvis, there might even be - gulp - a benefit. "Nicotine is a psychomotor stimulant, in the same group of drugs as amphetamines," he says. "So a cigarette could potentially enhance performance in 'explosive' events like sprinting."

Hestrie Cloete, the South African athlete who switched from 800m to high jump in order to accommodate her pack-a-day habit, might agree. "I jump with my legs not my lungs," she said after winning Olympic silver in 2004, adding that she would smoke between rounds if it were allowed.

In golf, smoking is very much allowed between rounds (and between shots). Players in this year's US Open were even given special exemption from a San Diego bylaw that forbids ciggies at

Torrey Pines, part of a smoke-free state park.

Says Jarvis: "If you're a dependent smoker, you can't manage very well without it. Nicotine withdrawal isn't very pleasant." (Ask Shane Warne: even with the inducement of £75,000 to endorse a nicotine chewing gum, he failed to quit in 1999.) So Zinedine Zidane, caught smoking on the eve of the World Cup final in 2006, did so not, says Jarvis, "because it would set him up for the match, but simply because he wouldn't feel good if he didn't". Prowse agrees. "If people are extremely tense, they often say that smoking helps them not to be. Well, people produce their best performances when they're not extremely tense."

Grounds, perhaps, to cut Rooney some slack. London-based GP and medical journalist Michael Fitzpatrick offers a final appeal: "Athletic performance relies upon a certain spirit of independence, an individual autonomy to pursue a goal of high physical fitness," he says. "Telling people how to live their lives - smoking and diet and everything else - tends to compromise initiative, which is really the essence of sporting achievement."

In other words: don't fence the man in. If England's most talented footballers to fulfil his potential, to reach a position where he, too, can smoke on the eve of a World Cup final - he needs the freedom to puff. Match, Wayne?

Messi hits hattrick in Barca win

AFP, Madrid

Argentine star Lionel Messi, currently at the centre of an Olympic Games club-or-country row, hit a hattrick in Barcelona's 5-1 pre-season friendly win over Scotland's Dundee United on Saturday.

Messi found the target in the 51st, 75th and 78th minutes while Thierry Henry (26) and Samuel Eto'o (60) added to the scoreline after the Scots had taken a shock lead.

Barcelona insist that Messi cannot play in the Beijing Olympics as he's wanted for the club's opening Champions League qualifier.

Friedel seals Villa move

AFP, London

Goalkeeper Brad Friedel completed his 2.5million pound move from Blackburn to Aston Villa on Saturday and vowed to help the Midlands side break into the Premier League top four.

The 37-year-old ended his eight-season association with Blackburn, who signed England keeper Paul Robinson from Tottenham on Friday, and decided to move to Villa Park rather than Manchester City.

The American told www.avfc.co.uk: "Making this move was a very easy decision and a very difficult decision to make all at the same time."

"I'd been at Blackburn eight years and this was going to be my ninth season. The fans and everyone at the club have been terrific with me."

"In saying that I'm really excited to be here at Aston Villa. Being able to work with these players, with (Martin) O'Neill and with Mr (Randy) Lerner (club owner) is exciting for me."

"I've really got the feeling this club is going places and that's the main reason why I'm here. Hopefully we can improve on last year. Sixth was good but if we can move into fifth or fourth that would be fantastic."

Chimbonda joins Sunderland

AFP, Sunderland

French defender Pascal Chimbonda has joined Sunderland from Premier League rivals Tottenham on a three-year contract for an undisclosed fee, the north-east club announced Saturday.

The 29-year-old full-back, who can also play in the centre of defence, is the second player to move from White Hart Lane to the Stadium of Light this week after Finland midfielder Teemu Tainio.

Sunderland manager Roy Keane told the club's official website: "Pascal is one of those rare players who can play anywhere across the back line and that will be invaluable to us, so we're very pleased to secure his services."

Chimbonda joined Tottenham from Wigan for 4.5 million pounds (nine million dollars) two years ago and his top-flight experience was not lost on former Manchester United and Republic of Ireland midfielder Keane.

"He has a lot of Premier League experience which can only be a plus for us and he'll give us more options at the back, creating more competition for places there, so all-in-all he's a fantastic signing for us."

'Olympics tougher than WC'

Football

AFP, Singapore

Securing a first Olympic title will be a tougher job than the World Cup, Brazil's coach Dunga said Sunday, and insisted his young team was up to the task of football gold at the Beijing Games.

While Brazil have held the World Cup five times they have never won at the Olympics, but Dunga said his squad - including Ronaldinho - were coping well with the weight of expectation.

"To win (an) Olympic medal is a bit harder because we don't have much time to prepare," he told reporters in Singapore ahead of an exhibition match here Monday.

"With respect to the World Cup, we have four years to prepare for it... in Olympic Games normally we have 15 days and players are com-

ing back from holidays, from other competition," he said.

The Brazilian team, including two-time World Player of the Year Ronaldinho, 18-year-old AC Milan sensation Alexandre Pato, and Manchester United's Anderson, have been going through drills and tactics since arriving last week.

"There is a lot of pressure in winning... most of these players, although they are young, they are already playing in big teams in Europe and also in Brazil so they are coping quite well," said Dunga.

Anderson, who already has Premier League and Champions League titles under his belt, is keen to add another medal to his rapidly escalating collection.

"I am playing for my country and that is really important for me," he told the Straits Times newspaper.

"Every player wants to win in Europe, but I can't deny how

important it is to win the only medal that Brazil has never won."

Eighteen-year-old Pato, who has been hailed as Milan's bright new hope, said experienced players like 28-year-old Ronaldinho would help steady the nerves.

"I am glad to be in a team that consists of more experienced players who can help and support me on the field," he told reporters.

"It also calms me and helps me to try and do my best on the field."

Dunga and his team arrived in Singapore last week as part of preparations for next month's Olympics.

After a game Monday against Singapore, they will head to Hanoi for a friendly against Vietnam's national side on August 1.

Brazil won the Olympic silver medal in the 1984 and 1988 Games, and bronze in 1996. The Olympic tournament begins on August 6, with the final on August 23.

Scolari defends Asian tour

Football

AFP, Macau

Chelsea coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has defended the club's Asian tour after reports emerged of back-room unrest among players unhappy with the rigorous pre-season trip.

The newly installed coach said the three-stop Asian swing, followed by a four-team tournament in Russia, was vital as he builds towards Chelsea's August 17 league opener.

Chelsea strolled to a 7-0 win against hopelessly outclassed Chengdu Blades late on Saturday after thrashing Guangzhou Pharmaceutical in mid-week. They play in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday and then head to Moscow for the Railways Cup.

"This is match training for us," Scolari said.

"I'm building my team for the Russia games and after Russia I will have my team for the first match against Portsmouth."

Scolari was speaking after British media reported several senior players were angry at touring the sweltering and far-flung

Asian venues just weeks before the new season.

The two-week tour represented "the worst possible preparations for the season," a source told The Sun.

"Some players have been unable to sleep and don't know if they are coming or going," the source added.

Winger Joe Cole, who struck twice in the rout of Chengdu Blades, admitted the team found conditions difficult but said they owed such trips to their fans.

"It's hot and it's humid but I think for professional players at a club like Chelsea, it's our responsibility to come out and play," Cole said.

"These fans pay a lot of money to come out and buy our shirts and give great support. It's our opportunity to come out and play football and give something back."

Chelsea have been good value with 11 goals in two matches - albeit in front of half-empty stadiums. On Saturday, Cole scored with his first touch and added another with an outrageous inside-heel flick as the team ran riot.

"These trips are very important in two senses to get fitness and to

get out and spread the word to fans on the other side of the world," Cole said.

He added that he was happy to compete for his place after another assured performance by newcomer Deco, whose dribbles and passing tied Chengdu in knots.

"He's going to be an outstanding player for us I'm sure," Cole said.

"There's a lot of competition for places at Chelsea - there's four or five wingers and three or four strikers. Competition for places pushes you on."

Meanwhile Scolari claimed ignorance that Shaun Wright-Phillips, whose fluke goal rewarded an outstanding performance, had been strongly linked with Portsmouth.

"I haven't asked him about it if he wants to go to another team or not," Scolari said.

"He's here with the team and playing for Chelsea. I don't know the news about him changing team."

"It's the first time I hear that Wright-Phillips might want to change. After this press conference I will ask Shaun if he wants to change or not but I don't know."

MU win Vodacom Challenge

Football

AFP, Pretoria

Sir Alex Ferguson insisted Manchester United will tour South Africa again after winning Vodacom Challenge on Saturday - but admitted that plans to return in 2010, World Cup year, are unlikely to bear fruit.

Goals from Ryan Giggs, Wayne Rooney, Tom Cleverley and Fraizer Campbell sealed a 4-0 win against Kaizer Chiefs at Loftus Versfeld to complete United's three-game tour of the country.

United immediately flew out of Johannesburg for a game against Premier League rivals Portsmouth in Abuja, Nigeria, on Sunday, but Ferguson admitted that he is keen for the club to make another visit to South Africa in the near future.

Ferguson said: "There has been some dialogue over the possibility of us coming back to South Africa in 2010 after the World Cup, but I'm not too sure that it will work."

"Once the World Cup is over, people will want a rest from football! 2010 has been discussed for us, but whether that happens or not, there will certainly be other

opportunities I'm sure."

"We have a lot of supporters in South Africa, though, and we have been delighted by the response we have had during our time here."

United were forced to deal with some heavy challenges from the Chiefs players and the European champions endured a physical battle just 24 hours before their game in Nigeria.

A dead-leg suffered by Rooney makes him doubtful for the Abuja game, but Ferguson insisted that his squad can cope with the draining effects of travelling to Nigeria and then playing the fixture against the FA Cup winners.

He said: "Wayne took a whack to the knee early in the second-half and he ended up with a dead-leg, so we took him off, but he's ok."

"The Portsmouth game on Sunday makes it two games in two days, but we have been quite lucky in that we have been able to make lots of changes against Chiefs."

"Gary Neville and Mikael Silvestre will start as full-backs in Nigeria, and both Paul Scholes and Carlos Tevez will also start, so we will still have a lot of freshness in the team."

"Only Danny Simpson and John O'Shea played the whole ninety

minutes here, so they won't be involved against Portsmouth."

Hamburg win, Bayern draw

AFP, Berlin

Hamburg's new recruit Jonathan Pitroipa celebrated his debut with the winning goal as the Bundesliga side beat English Premier League side Manchester City 1-0 on Saturday in a pre-season friendly.

In front of a 32,000 crowd, the 22-year-old Burkina Faso international midfielder, who joined Hamburg from second-division Freiburg during the summer, struck the 16th-minute winner.

Hamburg start their Bundesliga campaign against defending champions Bayern Munich on August 15 at Munich's Allianz Arena.

Meanwhile, Bayern continued their pre-season preparations with a 0-0 draw against newly-promoted Cologne.

However, Borussia Dortmund's friendly against Juventus on Saturday was postponed until Sunday after heavy rain waterlogged the pitch.

Lack of finances no excuse

AFP, Munich



The lack of financial fire power felt by Germany's top clubs compared to their European neighbours is no excuse for failure in the Champions League, insists Bayern Munich coach Jürgen Klinsmann.

"I do not accept the argument about the lack of finances amongst our clubs compared to Europe's top clubs," Klinsmann told Sunday's edition of the Süddeutsche Zeitung.

"The Top 15 clubs are all equipped with good international players and in the long-term, it is more important to have a good,

hard-working team ethic than a hundred transfers."

Klinsmann's opinion directly contradicts the sentiments of Bayern chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

The former striker painted a bleak future for Germany clubs in Europe after the on-going wrangle here concerning the amount of money Bundesliga clubs will get for the screening of live football.

Rummenigge deplored the situation in Germany where the Federal Cartel Office has ruled the current television contract to broadcast live Bundesliga games is a monopoly and must be renegotiated - which could cost Germany's clubs millions of euros in lost revenue.

But Klinsmann says Bayern are not in the "second-tier" of European clubs and have to be

confident of their chances in the Champions League this season.

"Still so many billionaires can come into the game, whether they are from Russia or America," he said.

"If I can work with a top team, we can do the same at Bayern as if we had 50 million euros to spend on players, given enough chances this team will develop."

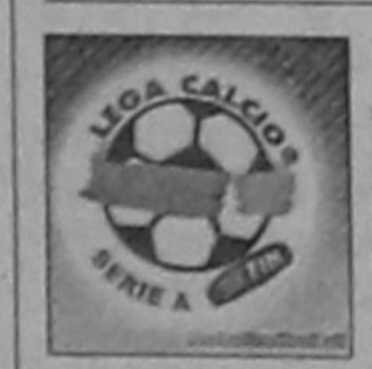
"My job is to improve my players in such a way that we can compete against the financially strong clubs such as Chelsea or Milan."

The last time Bayern won the Champions League was in 2001 and Klinsmann is determined to bring further success.

The defending Bundesliga champions begin the defence of their league title on August 15 against Hamburg.

Penalty miss behind Natale

AFP, Rome



Udinese forward Antonio Di Natale said on Saturday he has put June's costly Euro 2008 penalty miss against Spain well and truly behind him.

Di Natale was one of two Italy players to miss penalties in the quarterfinal shoot-out which Spain won before going on to lift the trophy in Vienna.

But Di Natale, whose only start in the competition came in Italy's embarrassing opening 3-0 drubbing at the hands of the Netherlands, says he is not letting that affect him ahead of the new season.

"I feel calm and collected. I realise I can't live off memories, obviously I look back at the good ones but like everyone I have to start from scratch again," he said.

Di Natale has been at the centre of transfer speculation during the

close season with some of Italy's top teams rumoured to be circling but the Italy international insists he is going nowhere.

"For the last time I will repeat that I'm not leaving Udinese even if everyone is convinced that by the end of the transfer window I'll be leaving for one squad or another."

"However, transfer speculation is good because it's nice to be wanted, I am after all 31."

Even at his age, Di Natale is hoping to be retained in the Italy squad by coach Marcello Lippi, who took over from Roberto Donadoni following Italy's unsuccessful Euro 2008 showing.

"Lippi is someone capable and intelligent, he rewards those who do well on the field and I'll do my utmost to convince him to keep faith with me," added Di Natale.

Udinese qualified for the UEFA Cup this season after finishing seventh last season. At times they were even challenging for a top four spot and Champions League football this season but Di Natale is

wary of the unfashionable club setting their sights too high.

"Udinese has to have modest ambitions, like the boss said, the aim is to get 40 points and stay up."

Bosingwa out of season opener

AFP, Macau

New Chelsea signing Jose Bosingwa will miss the start of the Premier League season after being forced out of their Asian tour with a thigh injury, coach Luiz Felipe Scolari said on Saturday.

The Portugal right-back is out for at least three weeks with a muscle tear, ruling him out of Chelsea's August 17 season opener against Portsmouth. Bosingwa, 25, lasted just 20 minutes of his debut this week.

"I think he's out for the first match against Portsmouth," Scolari said. "But I have players for this position so it's not a problem for us."



Manchester United star Wayne Rooney intercepts the ball during a friendly match at the Loftus Stadium in Pretoria on Saturday.