

## Kanu extends Pompey stay

AFP, Portsmouth

Nigeria striker Kanu has signed a new one-year contract with FA Cup winners Portsmouth after months of negotiations over the new deal.

Kanu, 32, was keen to secure a long-term contract following his FA Cup heroics for Haringey's Redknapp's side last season.

But the former Arsenal star eventually agreed to accept Portsmouth's one-year offer, with the option of another year's extension if he plays an agreed number of matches this season.

"I'm delighted to have signed. I've been with these players for two years now and the spirit is fantastic," he said.

The manager Harry Redknapp is the main man and I love the fans. They are the best in the league, like a 12th man in the team.

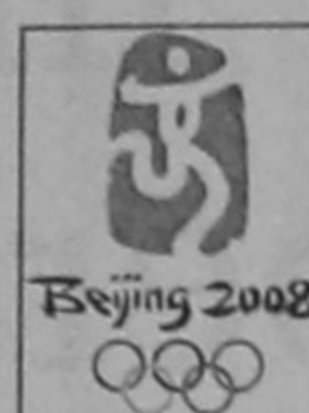
"And I want to score more goals than last season and more like my first season here. Above all I want to give 100 percent all the time."

Kanu, who joined Portsmouth on a free transfer from West Bromwich Albion in August 2006, has been struggling with a thigh injury during pre-season and faces a race to get fit in time for Sunday's Community Shield against Manchester United.

"I'm doing a programme with the physios and getting better, so I wouldn't want to rule myself out. I'm keeping my fingers crossed," he said.

## Ronnie wary of Argentina

AFP, Beijing



Superstar Ronaldinho on Wednesday singled out Argentina as the main threat to Brazil winning Olympic gold, and warned his teammates they cannot afford to lose their focus.

The 28-year-old is one of coach Dunga's over-age players for the Olympics after his new club AC Milan gave the go-ahead for him to take part, and he is lapping up the experience.

"Everyone has been so friendly to us it's amazing. Now it's our turn to repay them for their warmth and hospitality by performing well on the pitch," he told FIFA.com.

If Brazil win their group and quarter-final matches they are scheduled to meet Argentina in the semis, and Ronaldinho is well aware of the threat they pose.

"There's no doubt that Argentina are an excellent side who deserve all my respect," he said.

"They've got some world class players and we know all about them.

But we've also got our strengths and we deserve respect from everyone."

But less than 24 hours before their opening matches, the South Americans were still in the dark about their line-ups.

The football competition kicks off on Thursday and it appears unlikely that Argentina will have Lionel Messi in their side after his club Barcelona won an appeal Wednesday to keep him out of the Games.

The Spanish giants were reluctant to let 21-year-old play, arguing that Olympic matches are not part of the international calendar, and the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled in their favour.

The verdict also affects Brazil's Diego and Rafinha, who play with Germany's Werder Bremen and Schalke respectively and who are currently with the Olympic team.

"Our expectation is to advance as far as we can in the tournament and reach the semi-finals," said Ronaldinho.

"We can't afford to lose our focus, though, and we need to take things step by step."

Brazil open their campaign against Belgium in Shenyang.



Bayern Munich midfielder Hamit Altintop (R) challenges Inter Milan star Luis Figo during their friendly match at the Olympic Stadium in Munich on Tuesday. Inter won 1-0.

## Makaay inspires Drenthe

AFP, Beijing

Real Madrid dynamo Royston Drenthe is relishing the chance of playing alongside Dutch legend Roy Makaay at the Olympics, and is confident the Netherlands have what it takes to win gold.

Though his first season in Madrid failed to bring a consistent starting spot at the Bernabeu, Drenthe's blinding speed and industry turned more than a few heads.

And the 21-year-old is eager to learn from 33-year-old Makaay, the former Bayern Munich striker who is in China as an over-age player.

"I used to watch Makaay when I was a little boy, and I never dreamed I would get to play with a legend like this," Drenthe told FIFA.com.

"I had the chance to play with him at Feyenoord and now we're wearing the orange shirt together. It's amazing."

"We're not little boys, we Under-23 guys played for clubs you know," he added, referring to himself, Ryan Babel of Liverpool, Valencia's Hedwiges Maduro and a host of others in the team.

"But a guy like Roy (Makaay) will stop you in training and say 'hey, slow it down' or 'no, do it this way,' and you can't help but be grateful for it."

The Netherlands have been drawn against Nigeria, the United States, and Japan in the group stages of the tournament that kicks off on Thursday, and Drenthe is in high spirits.

"I think we're going to do it," he said.

"I want to play well. I want to score goals and make my teammates happy, make the people back home happy -- all that good stuff."

## Gerrard faces fitness battle

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool could be without midfield dynamo Steven Gerrard for their August 13 Champions League qualifier against Belgium's Standard Liege as he battles a thigh strain, the club said Wednesday.

The England star had to go off during the 4-1 win over Norwegian side Valerenga and coach Rafa Benitez said it was tough and go whether he would make recovery.

"It is a thigh strain. We need to wait but it could be one week," Benitez told www.liverpoolfc.tv as he ponders his selection for the tie with a place in the group stages a financial must.

Fernando Torres, Xabi Alonso, David Ngog and Yossi Benayoun were on target in another four-goal show after a weekend destruction of Rangers at Ibrox.

"The players aren't 100 percent yet," according to Benitez.

Liverpool next face Italian outfit Lazio at Anfield on Friday.

## Scolari wants popularity

AFP, London

Luiz Felipe Scolari has vowed to make Chelsea more popular by avoiding the kind of controversy that Jose Mourinho courted during his reign at Stamford Bridge.

Scolari has only been in charge at Stamford Bridge since July and his forceful personality have already earned comparisons with Mourinho, who led Chelsea to two league titles.

But the Brazilian is adamant he wants Chelsea to be loved so he won't follow Mourinho's penchant for making explosive comments about other teams and officials.

"I am not Jose Mourinho, so why compare me with him? Mourinho says 'I will win 10 championships' but I am more modest than that," Scolari said.

"I am from south Brazil and in my culture we never say 'I will win

this or that'. I just say that I will try my best to win all the competitions. But Mourinho is Mourinho, he has a different culture to me."

"I want to make Chelsea loved around the world, like Barcelona and Manchester United. It's a surprise for me that people say Chelsea are unpopular, because when we went to China, they love Chelsea."

"There were many people there. It's a big surprise people don't like us in England. Here in Russia, in Malaysia, it's even better, but maybe not yet in Brazil or South America."

"Chelsea is a club that is a growing name. Before, it was Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, Milan."

"If we win one or two big competitions, I'm sure we'll have fans all over the world. Maybe it won't be the same as Madrid, Manchester or Milan because our history is not the same and you don't make a history in two, three or ten years. Maybe in 20 or 50 years, Chelsea

will be on that level."

While Mourinho spent millions on building Chelsea into one of Europe's top clubs, Scolari is keen to implement the club's new policy of bringing through more players from the youth academy.

Scolari has signed only Portugal midfielder Deco since taking charge and, although he has been linked with a bid for Real Madrid's Robinho, he insists there is no need to spend big money on such a strong squad.

"Since I came to Chelsea we have only spent eight million pounds on Deco. Jose Bosingwa came in before I arrived," he said.

"Maybe in the past they have spent more money, but now they don't need to spend as much because they already have a solid base. Now they need a coach to develop young players and I think I am that coach."

"The new philosophy at Chelsea is to bring some young boys through the system."

## Robinho seeks Chelsea move

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's Brazilian striker Robinho has told the club he wants to join compatriot Luiz Felipe Scolari, a Spanish newspaper said Wednesday.

Robinho told Real president Ramon Calderon that he would leave, ABC reported, if he wanted the player was using the same argument as the Spanish champions are themselves deploying to lure Cristiano Ronaldo from Manchester United.

The Spanish press has often urged Real to sell Robinho, who joined the club in 2005, to help finance the possible purchase of Ronaldo.

Real are reportedly ready to pay up to 85 million euros (132.5 million dollars) for the Portuguese striker, but Manchester United have repeatedly insisted he is not for sale.

Robinho feels unwanted at Real, and was hurt by the club's decision to prevent him joining the Brazil squad at the Olympics in Brazil, ABC said.

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon said on July 21 he is hopeful of signing Robinho, and British media have reported the London club has offered 25 million pounds (32 million euros, 49 million dollars) for the 24-year-old.

"It is well noted we have shown interest. We have had discussions with Madrid over it and they are ongoing. The window is still open and we are still talking to Madrid," Kenyon said.

In another statement, on August 1, Kenyon said that "one of the key issues over buying Robinho has always been that Real Madrid are looking for a replacement."

"It is fair to say that it is what has been holding up discussions between the two clubs."

## German clubs want stars back

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen and Schalke 04 look set to bring their Brazilian star home from the Beijing Olympics before a ball is kicked after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruled on Wednesday in favour of the Bundesliga clubs' battle with FIFA.

Bremen want Brazilian midfielder Diego back in time for the new Bundesliga season which kicks off on August 15, while Schalke also want their Brazil star Rafinha.

The clubs both appealed to CAS after arguing against FIFA's insistence that all players aged 23 and under must be released by their clubs for the Olympics.

"We are pleased with the decision, because we have worked closely with the clubs in this legal matter," said German Football League spokesman Holger Hieronymus.

"It was always our opinion that under FIFA regulations we were not committed to allowing our players to go freely."

"FIFA failed to realise the legal implications of this decision early and the preparation of the clubs ahead of the new season has been affected."

Both Diego and Rafinha travelled to Beijing against the clubs' wishes. The Olympics tournament begins on Thursday, when Brazil are set to face Belgium.

Despite the ruling, Argentina coach Sergio Batista said he intended to play Lionel Messi in Thursday's game against Ivory Coast despite Barcelona's insistence that the player return to Spain.

## Rangers out of Europe



AFP, Kaunas

Rangers' European dream is over before the season has barely begun after the UEFA Cup finalists suffered a shock 2-1 defeat at FBK Kaunas here on Tuesday.

The Scottish giants travelled to Lithuania needing an away goal after last week's goalless first leg of this Champions League second round qualifier.

But with no safety net of the UEFA Cup to fall back on at this stage of the competition Tuesday's loss means Rangers are out of Europe before the Scottish Premier League has even started.

The Lithuanian minnows sealed their place in the next round with a late goal from Linas Pilibaitis.

Rangers had taken the lead in the first half through a rare strike from midfielder Kevin Thomson.

But a thunderbolt free-kick from Nerijus Radzius cancelled out their advantage on the stroke of half-time before former Hearts player Pilibaitis clinched the tie in the 86th minute.

Rangers manager Walter Smith offered no excuses.

"The game was there to be won. We had opportunities, not very many obviously, but we never managed to take them."

"We gave away needless free-kicks and corners which was always

going to be a major problem in the game."

He added: "We just didn't do well enough overall and I don't think we showed we were comfortable at any stage of the game."

"It seems fairly ridiculous that you can reach a European and then get knocked out at the first game of the next season but that's the way it has happened."

Rangers had their first effort on target in the second minute.

Spanish striker Nacho Novo fired in a cross which took a deflection and had to be turned over the crossbar by Kaunas keeper Marian Kello.

Kenny Miller was then presented with a chance in the 14th minute when Christian Dailly found him with a high pass over the top of the Kaunas defence, but the Scottish internationalist's chip from the edge of the box went well over the bar.

Kevin Thomson found himself in the referee's book after a late tackle in the 20th minute but it was the midfielder who opened the scoring in the 32nd minute after some fine wing work by Nacho Novo.

The Spaniard showed great strength and determination to fend off defender Nerijus Radzius and pick out Thomson in the box, who slotted the ball home through keeper Allan McGregor's legs for his first European goal for Rangers.

There was a nervy moment for the keeper in the 40th minute when he failed to get a hand to a Ledesma free-kick but it just cleared the far post.

But a goal was not long in coming

for Kaunas, who equalised two minutes from half-time with a magnificent free-kick from Radzius.

The defender slammed home the ball from 35 yards out with a thunderbolt kick that beat the Rangers' wall and flew into the top left-hand corner of McGregor's net.

Kaunas looked more organised at the start of the second half and soon had a chance to take the lead when Marius Cinikas shot from the edge of the box smashed off the crossbar.

McGregor then had to be at his best to save a downward header from Adrian Mrowiec in the 59th minute. The Rangers keeper was the busiest man on the pitch at this time and he was called into action again in the 70th minute. Kaunas won a free-kick which Rafael Ledesma took.

His cross was high and long and McGregor did well to grasp the ball on the line.

A rare Rangers attack in the 74th minute saw Kenny Miller break down the left wing but his cross was too near Kello who caught it confidently after it bounced off the goal surface.

Substitute Andrius Velicka had a great chance to win it for Rangers in the 80th minute when Sasa Papac cut the ball back to him at the penalty spot but the former Kaunas player hit his shot well over the bar.

But it was to be Kaunas' night and Linas Pilibaitis sent the home fans wild when his header from a corner somehow made its way into the Rangers' net past McGregor and a defender on the line.

## It's all about fluid tactics



AFP, London

Club football has outstripped national football to such an extent that major international tournaments no longer revolutionise the sport, but they still provide a useful window onto the zeitgeist.

Of the 16 teams at Euro 2008, eight began the tournament playing with two out-and-out forwards; by the end, a further three, including both finalists, Spain and Germany, had switched to a lone striker.

The victory of 4-5-1 is all but complete. Football had been moving in that direction for some time. No longer is five in midfield the preserve of lesser teams looking to kill the game or away sides in Europe seeking a goalscoring draw.

Of the 16 teams who made it to the knockout stage of last season's Champions League, only five played a traditional 4-4-2, and of them only

Schalke 04 and Arsenal - whose system was extremely fluid - made it to the quarter-finals.

The trend seems all but certain to be continued in the Premier League this season, which is not, as some would have us believe, a negative shift.

On the contrary, it breaks the often rigid lines of 4-4-2 and, when played well, leads to a greater fluidity and fluency.

That was something Sir Alex Ferguson acknowledged in 2000. The previous season, he had won the Treble with a 4-4-2 (or 4-4-1-1, to be precise), but difficult games against Deportivo La Coruna and a quarter-final exit to Real Madrid persuaded him of the benefits of the extra midfielder.

For one thing, it permitted an extra holding player as cover in front of the back-four, and for another, it allowed the use of three creators: dribbling and fantasy could suddenly flourish again.

The signing of Juan Sebastian Veron was a failure, but it was part of Ferguson's shift to a 4-2-3-1, which

reached unexpected levels last season when the system frequently appeared to feature no orthodox forwards at all.

With Louis Saha injured, he paired Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez, both players who drop deep, creating an attacking vacuum that bewildered defenders, opening the way for Cristiano Ronaldo to swoop in from the wing. He responded with an astonishing 42 goals.

One up front looks like being central to thinking of the other members of the Big Four as well.

Perhaps, having signed Robbie Keane, Rafa Benitez is considering a 4-4-2 with Liverpool, but the success Fernando Torres enjoyed in a 4-2-3-1, with Ryan Babel, Steven Gerrard and Dirk Kuyt arrayed behind him, suggests that 4-4-2 is merely an option, and Keane could end up as part of the attacking-midfield three.

Arsene Wenger was for a long time an inveterate 4-4-2 man, but he too has shifted to a one-up policy, usually in a 4-1-4-1.

That is why he was so keen to

hold on to Emmanuel Adebayor who, like Torres and Berbatov, is both physically imposing and technically gifted and so ideal as the focal point for attacking midfielders to play off.

At Chelsea, Luiz Felipe Scolari shows no sign of turning away from the 4-3-3 first instituted by Jose Mourinho.

The modern interpretation of the system, though, has little to do with the formation introduced by Brazil at the 1962 World Cup; rather it is another variant of 4-5-1, with two wingers supporting a lone front man.

Perhaps most intriguing, though, is what is happening at Tottenham, where Juande Ramos has signed Luka Modric and Giovanni dos Santos, two physically slight players who would usually be expected to struggle amid the physicality of the Premier League.

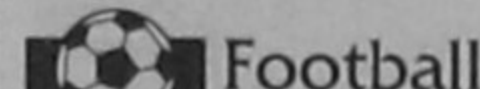
With modern rules to protect them and a modern 4-2-3-1 to provide a platform, frail fantasistas can prosper even in England.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Brazil star Marta (L) fights for the ball with Ariane Hingst of Germany during the women's first round match at the Beijing Olympics in Shenyang on Wednesday. The match ended scoreless.

## Eto'o shines in pre-season



AFP, Madrid

Barcelona have deemed Samuel Eto'o's surplus but the Cameroon international striker's impressive performance in the pre-season has led his teammates and some fans to ask the Spanish club to reconsider.

"The entire team backs him. He's one of the best in the world. I don't know what is going on with the club but he's very important to the team," French striker Thierry Henry said Sunday after Barcelona beat Mexican side CD Guadalajara 5-2 in a friendly in Chicago.

Eto'o contributed two of the goals after coming on as a substitute in the second half, the first one just four minutes after he hit the pitch.

The 27-year-old, Barcelona's top scorer in the Spanish league last year

with 16 goals, has scored three times in four pre-season matches.

Eto'o was one of three high-profile Barcelona players - Deco and Ronaldinho being the others - told in June that he was not part of new coach Pep Guardiola's plans as the club seeks to rebuild following a second successive trophyless season.

Deco has since joined English side Chelsea while Ronaldinho has joined Italian side AC Milan but Eto'o's has so far failed to find a new home while Barcelona continues to search for a much-needed striker to replace him.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said recently that the three-times African Player of the Year could stay at the club.

"In this world, nothing is unchanging. The decision is up to the technical staff. The sports dimension will always prevail. Samuel's attitude

is good and I appreciate his behaviour," he said, adding Barcelona sports chief Txiki Begiristain would have the final word.

Begiristain, however, has insisted that Eto'o, who signed from Mallorca in 2004, is on the way out.

"The best solution for Eto'o would be if he was sold before the Champions League preliminary games. The market is about to close and we're considering many options with Pep Guardiola," he said Tuesday.

If Eto'o were to play during Barcelona's third qualifying round of the Champions League next week he could not play in the tournament for his new team if he is transferred, which would complicate any deal.

Begiristain said Friday that at least "four or five big clubs" were interested in signing Eto'o but there had been no official offers yet, with the striker needing to agree terms with a

club before negotiations can begin.

"We are waiting for this agreement. If he moves, it'll be a big club, of course," he told Britain's Sky Sports News.

Laporta has said talks had taken place with Inter Milan and AC Milan. For his part Guardiola, who took over from Frank Rijkaard at the end of June, has also remained inflexible despite the striker's strong performances.

"My opinion has not changed. Eto'o is with us at the moment and as long as he is a Barcelona player we will try to get the best performance out of him," he said.

Barcelona's players meanwhile keep singing Eto'o's praises.

Midfielder Xavi Hernandez, voted Euro 2008's best player, has called him an "exceptional player" while Andres Iniesta and Lionel Messi have called him "one of the three best strikers in the world".