

Arshavin goes on strike

Tottenham Hotspur target Andrei Arshavin has reportedly gone on strike at Zenit St Petersburg and his agent claims the playmaker is being treated like a "slave".

The Russia international impressed at Euro 2008 to spark a summer bidding war for his services, with Barcelona having two offers rejected.

Tottenham are now believed to be in the box-seat to land Arshavin, but the move could be in jeopardy after the 27-year-old refused to play as Zenit crashed out of the Russian Cup on Wednesday.

To Arshavin's frustration, the UEFA Cup holders are refusing to budge from their £27 million valuation and White Hart Lane officials are unwilling to meet the price tag.

Arshavin's agent, Dennis Lachter, claims the player is being mistreated, telling The Independent: "This is the Russian way."

"Nothing will change because this is the old Soviet Union way. For the Russian sports establishment the desires of the player mean absolutely nothing."

"They are the big bosses. It is a dictatorship. He is a slave."

Earlier this summer FIFA president Sepp Blatter was roundly criticised after it was believed he had compared Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo to a slave due to his club's refusal to sell him to Real Madrid.

But Blatter recently attempted to clarify his comments, insisting he was referring to young players who were forced to sign contracts at an early age.

English ref suspended

One of England's most prominent soccer referees, Mark Clattenburg, has been suspended while enquiries are made into his business dealings, the English Football Association announced Thursday.

A joint statement from the FA and the referees' organisation, the Professional Game Match Officials Ltd, said the move was made because of "media reports concerning alleged debts incurred by companies connected to referee, Mark Clattenburg."

The announcement added: "It has been decided he will not officiate any matches pending enquiries into the background to these reports."

Clattenburg was due to officiate at Sunday's FA Community Shield match between Manchester United and Portsmouth but he has been replaced by another referee, Peter Walton. He will also miss the start of the English Premier league season, which begins on Saturday August 16.

Before becoming a professional referee, 33 year old Clattenburg was an electrician and ran a company with a business partner, John Hepworth. The firm allegedly failed to pay off debts to Hepworth, Britain's Sun newspaper reported.

Striker Andrew Johnson on Thursday finalised his transfer from Everton to Fulham for an undisclosed fee with the 27-year-old signing a four-year contract to seal his Craven Cottage deal.

England international Johnson will play alongside fellow new signing Bobby Zamora after finding himself all but frozen out on Merseyside following the arrival of Ayegbeni Yakubu from Middlesbrough last summer.

"I have made no secret of my wish to add Andy Johnson to my squad at Fulham," coach Roy Hodgson told the club's official website, www.fulhamfc.com.

"I believe that he has all the qualities needed to assist us in next season's campaign and I am more than delighted that we have secured his services for the long term."

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Double boost for Wenger

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger hopes to have Tomas Rosicky back from injury by September and is confident Eduardo will be available after his horrific broken leg by November.

Rosicky has been sidelined with a recurring thigh problem since January, while Eduardo is rehabilitating after the fractured leg and ankle dislocation he suffered at Birmingham in February.

Both players were at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday for a fans' day and Wenger insisted he is happy with their progress.

"The situation is positive for both players. We believe Tomas could be available in September and Eduardo maybe in November," he told Arsenal's website.

"Also it was good for them to be back in this kind of atmosphere. The players enjoy a day like that."



Manchester United stalwart Ryan Giggs (R) exchanges heated words with fellow Juventus veteran Hasan Salihamidzic during a pre-season friendly at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Juventus hold United

shoulder the goalscoring burden.

Tevez has endured a busy pre-season campaign, with this his sixth appearance already since the European champions returned to action at Aberdeen on July 12, and he has also been forced to deal with some heavy treatment from opposing defenders in his outings so far.

With Rooney and Ronaldo ruled out of the start of the season and Luis Saha seemingly not figuring in Ferguson's plans, Tevez is the only proven goalscorer available to the United manager, so he would have grimaced at the treatment being dished out the former West Ham forward by the Juventus defenders in the first-half.

Tevez was fortunate to escape a red card after reacting angrily to some over-zealous challenges during Saturday's victory over Espanyol and, although he continued to bear the brunt of some traditional Italian defending, Tevez kept his temper in check on this occasion.

However he did well to keep his cool following a scything tackle from behind by Nicola Legrottaglie midway through the first-half. Tevez writhed on the turf in agony, but he eventually rose to his feet to continue in the game.

But barring a 38th minute header from Darren Fletcher that was well saved by goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, the first-half was devoid of goalscoring chances.

The European champions raised their game in the second-half, however, and midfielder Paul Scholes should have put United ahead when he was picked out on the edge of the six-yard box by substitute Rafael Da Silva on 51 minutes.

But former England midfielder Scholes somehow headed over the crossbar when it appeared easier to hit the target.

As the game wore on, neither team could find the breakthrough and United completed their pre-season preparations with a 0-0 draw against a team they could yet meet again in the Champions League this season.

Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery has been voted German footballer of the year, according to a poll to be published in sports magazine Kicker on Thursday.

Ribery, who joined the German first division giants from Marseille last year, garnered 224 votes from Bundesliga players and managers, beating second-placed German international captain Michael Ballack by 109 votes.

He becomes only the second foreign player to win the award since its inception in 1960, the Brazilian Aliton winning the title in 2004.

"It's good for a sportsman to be recognized for his performances. But I have to say that the titles won last year by the team are far more important," said the Frenchman, currently recovering from an operation to his left ankle.

Ribery, 25, was part of the French national squad that came runners-up in the 2006 World Cup finals, going on to win the French Player of the Year award 12 months later.

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 - under new coach Jürgen Klinsmann.

Newcastle snap up Coloccini

English Premiership outfit Newcastle United have had their bid for Deportivo La Coruna's Argentine defender Fabricio Coloccini accepted, the Spanish club said overnight Wednesday on its website on Thursday.

A statement on Depor's official website, www.canaldeportivo.com, said the two clubs "reached a verbal agreement last week and a deal was confirmed in writing today."

Deportivo say they expect the final fee would be in the region of 10 million pounds (13 million euros).

The 26-year-old arrived at Deportivo in January 2005 for three million euros from AC Milan and has since established himself as a solid presence in the club's back four.

Bayern Munich's general manager Uli Hoenes on Thursday launched an amusing tirade against Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich's attempts to use his financial muscle to turn the London club into world beaters.

"I'm annoyed when I go each week to fill up with petrol. This petrol mafia are taking the money I need to give to my players," Hoenes told German sports website www.sport1.com.

"I'm disgusted and it's because of Mr Abramovich."

"This mafia rule the world and manipulate the price of petrol," added Hoenes.

"We have to beat teams like Chelsea on the pitch - that will be our compensation," said Hoenes, a former Bayern player and German international.

Hammers release Ljungberg

Sweden midfielder Freddie Ljungberg was released from his contract with West Ham on Wednesday, a statement on the club's website confirmed.

Ljungberg, 31, suffered an injury-hit campaign at Upton Park last season after his three million pounds (3.7 million euros) move from Arsenal.

He made just 28 appearances and opted to negotiate an early release just one season into his four-year contract.

Ljungberg, who spent nine years at Arsenal, will now consider whether to continue playing, with West Ham's website claiming "leading clubs at home and on the continent as well as the United States and Asia" are interested in signing him.

Villa after Young

Aston Villa indicated Thursday they hope to prise England international defender Luke Young from English Premiership rivals Middlesbrough after agreeing terms for the 29-year-old's services.

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Barca, Messi make peace

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CAS upheld an appeal from the Spanish club after FIFA, soccer's world governing body, said clubs must release eligible players.

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