

Miles to go before he sleeps

US OPEN

AP, New York
Roger Federer's rivals weren't exactly writing him off. Not publicly, anyway.
Still, plenty of people were, and he heard them. Federer delivered a response with his fifth consecutive

Building. "And if it's not the case, or I don't believe in it anymore, then I'll probably retire."
Here's the really bad news for men with designs on winning Grand Slam events: Federer is healthier than ever.
Not only is his bout with mono-nucleosis a distant memory, but his extra dedication to taking care of his body is paying dividends.
"What I'm striving for is longev-

ty. ... I feel so much better physically today than I ever have. I mean, like, maybe this year was difficult, but right now, the day after the U.S. Open, I feel like, 'My God, I'm fresh,'" Federer said. "I don't have these nagging injuries any more like I used to have when I was younger. I remember I had a sore arm every day when I was 20, 21. I had muscle pain all over my body after, like, a four-setter."
He mentioned, as he has in the past, that he intends to compete at the 2012 London Olympic tennis which will be contested at his beloved All England Club and beyond.
And why not?
He's still only 27, and unlike U.S. Open women's champion Serena Williams, who doesn't hide her interests in fashion and acting, Federer can be heard to say, "I live and breathe tennis," as he did Tuesday.
"I feel, for a very long time, that I'll always be able to win Wimbledon, always going to be able

to win the U.S. Open," Federer said, his latest silver trophy sitting inches away on a table. "The first thing that's probably going to go is the French Open, even though I think that should not be a problem, you know having a shot there because I'm such a good all-arounder and I've proven myself so much over the years there."
Ah, the French Open.
It's the one real gap on his

Wimbledon is only 75 per cent as big as the real one, he pointed out, and the one at the Australian Open is quite small.
But, Federer recounted, smiling at his own punline, "I told him, 'I don't know about the French Open.'"
Later, Murray said he figured Federer probably has at least four years left "right at the top."
"It depends how much everybody else improves, I guess," Murray said. "He's still playing great tennis, but, I mean, I wouldn't be surprised at all if he did overtake Sampras."
If Federer wins the Australian Open for the last year and this year as well, record-breaking No. 15 would begin at the French Open, of all places.
But instead of looking ahead to that, let's look back for a moment.
Until Monday night, everyone seemed concerned about Federer. About his game, about his health, about his mental state.
Everyone, that is, save Federer himself.

"I never really had any moment where I was like, 'Things are just not working out for me,'" he said, "because at the big tournaments, I actually did play very well."
That certainly is true: He reached the semifinals at the Australian Open and the finals at the French Open and Wimbledon.
And yet, Federer acknowledged Tuesday, he did feel a need to win this particular U.S. Open. Not because he harbored doubts about whether he could. But because, rather, he wondered whether he approached this trying year properly.
"Maybe I proved to myself that I was doing the right things, and that the season was difficult and tough for me and that I maybe did pick the right schedule," he said. "I have energy left at the end of the trip. I definitely came out here fresh. I'm still fresh today. I'm very happy with what my decision-making was."
He also is pleased to be heading into 2009 on a positive note.
No more "What's wrong with Roger?" questions.
"It's the end of the year, it's the last Grand Slam. He didn't have a bad year, but for his standards, not as good as he would have liked," Federer's part-time coach, Jose Higueras, said outside the locker room after Monday night's champagne celebration. "It's a great thing going into next year. It gives him a lot of hope to get ready for next season, and I think it's a great feeling for him."
Might not be the greatest feeling for the rest of the tour, though.

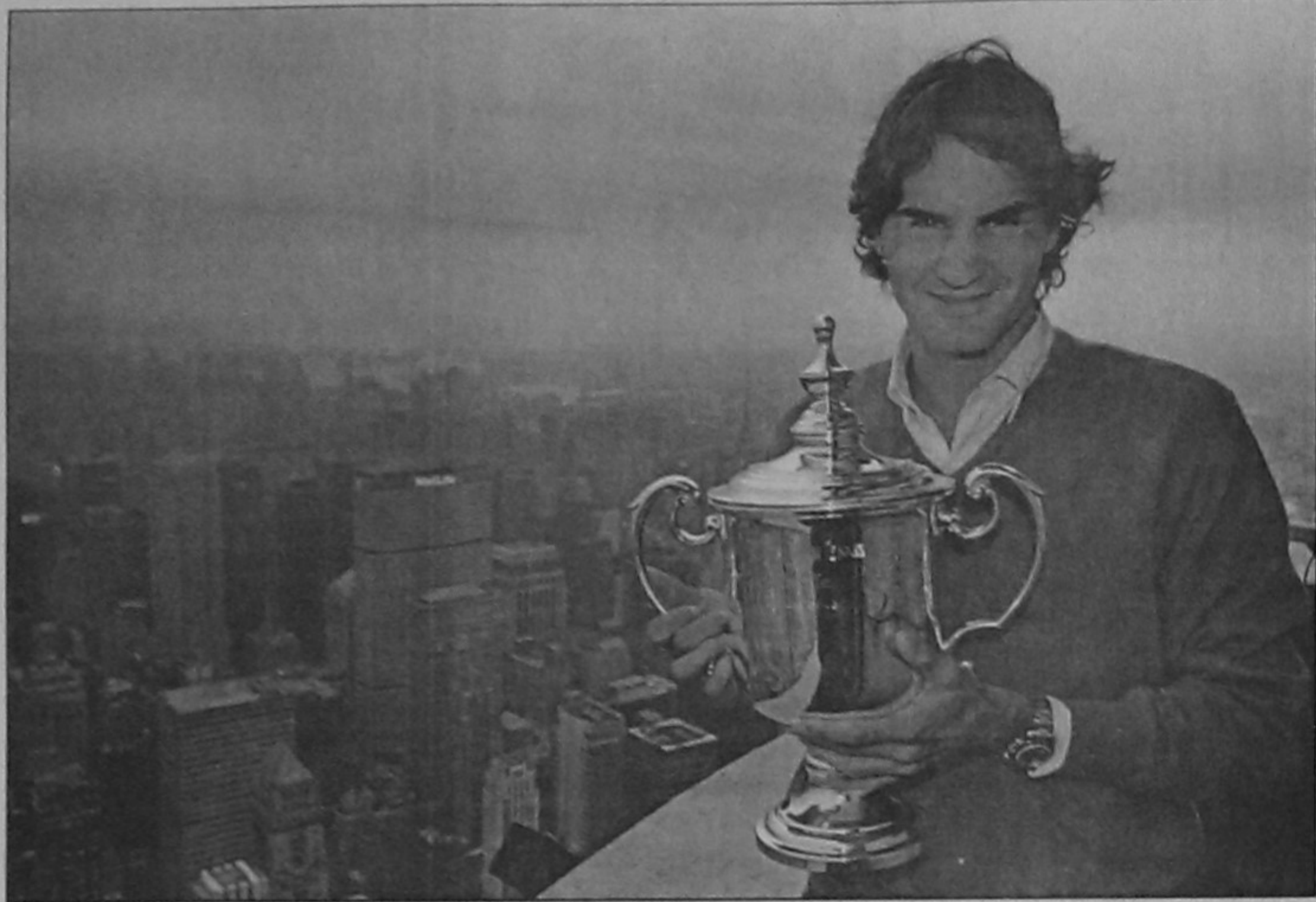


PHOTO: AFP

Swiss star and US Open champion Roger Federer displays his trophy during a photo-shoot on top of the Empire State Building in New York on Tuesday. Federer won his 13th career title on Monday and is just one shy of Pete Sampras' record of 14.

U.S. Open championship and his 13th career Grand Slam title, moving within one of Pete Sampras' record of 14.
The response amounted to this: Don't for a minute think I'm done.
Don't for a minute think I'm going away.
Don't for a minute think I won't be collecting more of these titles.
His play delivered that message at Flushing Meadows particularly in one-sided victories over Novak Djokovic in the semifinals and Andy Murray in the final. Then Federer went ahead and articulated it Tuesday when asked how long he can continue to win major tournaments.
"I have the belief right now that I can do it as long as I'm healthy, really. That's the way I feel. I'm going to believe till the end of my tennis days that I probably can win a Grand Slam," he told a small group of reporters at the Empire State

Building. "And if it's not the case, or I don't believe in it anymore, then I'll probably retire."
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resume, although he also listed leading Switzerland to a Davis Cup title and winning an Olympic gold medal in singles among his "many dreams" as yet unfulfilled.
Unlike Sampras, who only once made the semifinals at Roland Garros, Federer reached the past three finals there, losing each time to four-time champion Rafael Nadal. Nadal, of course, also stopped Federer's reign at Wimbledon and recently ended his 4 1/2-year stay at No. 1 in the rankings.
At least Federer can joke about his French Open history.
As he and Murray posed for post-match pictures Monday night, one with the champion's prize and the other with his runner-up dish, first-time Grand Slam finalist Murray asked whether Federer gets to keep the trophy.
So Federer explained that the U.S. Open replica trophy is the best of the lot because it's the same size as the original. What they give you at

Now Lennon is Real target

INTERNET, undated
Tottenham winger Aaron Lennon has emerged as a surprise target for Real Madrid.
The Spanish champions are looking to strengthen their right side after selling Robinho to Manchester City and missing out on Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo.
And Lennon has appeared on a short list of targets for the Bernabeu club, according to Spanish newspaper As.
Real's first choice is said to be Argentina's Olympics international Angel di Maria. Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester United have also tracked the 20-year-old but Benfica are reluctant to sell for less than his £24 million buy-out clause.
Brazilian Nilmar, of Internacional, is another option, along with Boca Juniors' Rodrigo Palacio and Klaas-Jan Huntelaar of Ajax.
But Lennon is perhaps the most surprising name on the list.
The diminutive has struggled to sustain the promising start he had when becoming the youngest Premier League debutant with Leeds, as a 16-year-old five years ago.
But the 21-year-old has nine England caps and is a regular in the Tottenham side.

Graffiti was Robinho's work

AGENCIES, undated
Brazil forward Robinho has owned up to daubing graffiti on the wall of the team's dressing room after Sunday's 3-0 win away to Chile in a World Cup qualifier.
Newspaper pictures showed the "words," "There must be respect for the best team in the world," written in Spanish on the walls of the National Stadium.
Robinho told reporters it was a response to the Chilean players, who he said underestimated Brazil before the game.
"I was the one who wrote it," he said. "Chile should have respected Brazil for our tradition, which I don't need to talk about. They thought it would be easy."
"We didn't ask for anything more than respect."
"Maybe if they had played more defensively, they would have made it more difficult for us. But they tried to play us on equal terms and you saw the result."

Fowler set for Rovers bow?

THE GUARDIAN
Robbie Fowler is on the verge of agreeing a pay-as-you-play deal with Blackburn Rovers. The deal is expected to be finalised by the end of the week, meaning Fowler would be available for selection for the match against Arsenal at Ewood Park this Saturday. The striker spent last season at Cardiff City but, though offered a new contract by the Bluebirds, accepted manager Paul Ince's offer to train with Rovers.
John Williams, the Blackburn chairman, was hopeful that a three-month deal would be signed by the end of the week. Williams said: "We have agreed in principle a three-month pay-as-you-play deal and we hope to have it tied up by the end of the week. If we go ahead on that basis and get it registered then if the manager wants him he would be able to be in the squad against Arsenal on Saturday."

Club loan saves Etherington's life

AGENCIES, undated
West Ham winger Matthew Etherington has received death threats over his £800,000 gambling debts.
The 27-year-old was forced to ask the club for a loan after he was warned that his life would be in danger if he didn't pay off a substantial sum.
Worried bosses gave him a £300,000 wages advance to get him out of immediate danger.
But the Hammers told Etherington, who earns £30,000 a week, he must start counselling for his gambling addiction.
A source said: "Matthew has been a very worried young man. The club decided they had no choice but to help."

Chiellini targets UCL return

AFP, Rome
Juventus centre-back Giorgio Chiellini has targeted next week's Champions League clash against UEFA Cup holders Zenit St Petersburg for his injury comeback.
Chiellini, Italy's one bright spark in their miserable Euro 2008 campaign in June, injured his knee in a friendly last month and was expected to face a month on the sidelines.
The 27-year-old now feels he is ready to start playing again and has not ruled out being included in Sunday's visit of Udinese.
But it is the match against the Russians that Chiellini is targeting as Juve are in one of the toughest qualifying groups for Europe's premier competition, also including Spanish champions Real Madrid.
"I hope to be on the field against Zenit. Who wouldn't want to play in such a match?" he said.
"My knee is clearly much better. I'm fit and ready. The coach (Claudio Ranieri) will decide if he will use me on Sunday and if so, for how long."

Essien faces five month lay-off

INTERNET, undated
Chelsea captain John Terry is confident Michael Essien will return from his knee injury in time to play a big part in their season.
The club confirmed yesterday Essien will need surgery to cure the problem and that he will be out for "several months."
It has been suggested in some quarters that the Ghana international could be out for the season, but Terry has spoken to the midfielder and revealed he may be back by February.
He said: "I spoke to Michael. He's had a bad injury. He was saying to me it's more like five months. It's very disappointing as Chelsea captain."
"He's been a fantastic player for the last year and this year as well. Hopefully he'll be back soon."
Essien's absence will be a major factor when Chelsea face Manchester City - who stole Robinho from under their noses on transfer deadline day - after the international break in Saturday's 5.30pm kick-off.

Drogba might be back Saturday

INTERNET, undated
Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari hopes Didier Drogba can play 45 minutes against Manchester City on Saturday.
Drogba has yet to make an appearance for Chelsea this season due to a knee injury, but returned for the reserves last week.
He is determined not to rush his comeback from the injury, but has been pleasing Scolari with his progress.
Scolari is now hoping that the striker, along with John Obi Mikel, could be involved in this weekend's trip to the City of Manchester Stadium.
"These are the players that I received for training this week. Mikel is in very good condition and Didier grows up every day and grows up every week," Scolari told Chelsea TV.
"He [Drogba] is not completely ready for the game against Manchester City, but in my idea he may be possible to play 45 minutes."
"He is starting, step-by-step, to arrive in the same situation [in fitness terms] as last season."
However, Scolari has received a blow to his plans after Michael Essien was ruled out for several months with a cruciate ligament injury picked up on international duty with Ghana.
The Brazilian added: "Many players are in national teams and the bad news that we received a few days ago is that Essien has an injury."
"If they play in the national teams then I am happy about this, but we know about Manchester City and what Chelsea can expect there, it is a big game."
"We have Thursday and Friday for training, and if they arrive in good condition, without injury, then it is okay for us."

Ribery set for surprise comeback

AFP, Munich
Bayern Munich midfielder Franck Ribery is hoping to play a role in next Wednesday's opening Champions League clash against Steaua Bucharest on his way back from ankle surgery.
Ribery tore ankle ligaments playing for France against Italy during Euro 2008 last June, but resumed full training with the Bayern squad on Monday and is hoping to be on the bench next week in Bucharest.
Having originally targeted the Champions League visit of Lyon to Munich on September 30 as his first game back, Ribery is now hoping to play some part in next Wednesday's clash with Steaua.
"I hope I'll be at least part of the squad," he said.
The 25-year-old then wants to play a full role in Bayern's Champions League clash with Lyon at Munich's Allianz Arena.
Ribery said Saturday's trip to face Cologne in the Bundesliga was too soon for him and he needs another two weeks of fitness work.
"Obviously I'm desperate to play, but I need another two weeks or so before I'm back to 100 per cent," he explained.
"I really enjoyed being back out on the pitch with the team."
"It's good news for me, after I've spent the last five or six weeks alone with the physios the whole time."
Having been voted the Bundesliga's player of the season on his debut year in Germany last term, Ribery said he would give his all when he returns.
"The minute I get back out onto the field, I'll give it my absolute maximum, just like I did last season," he said.

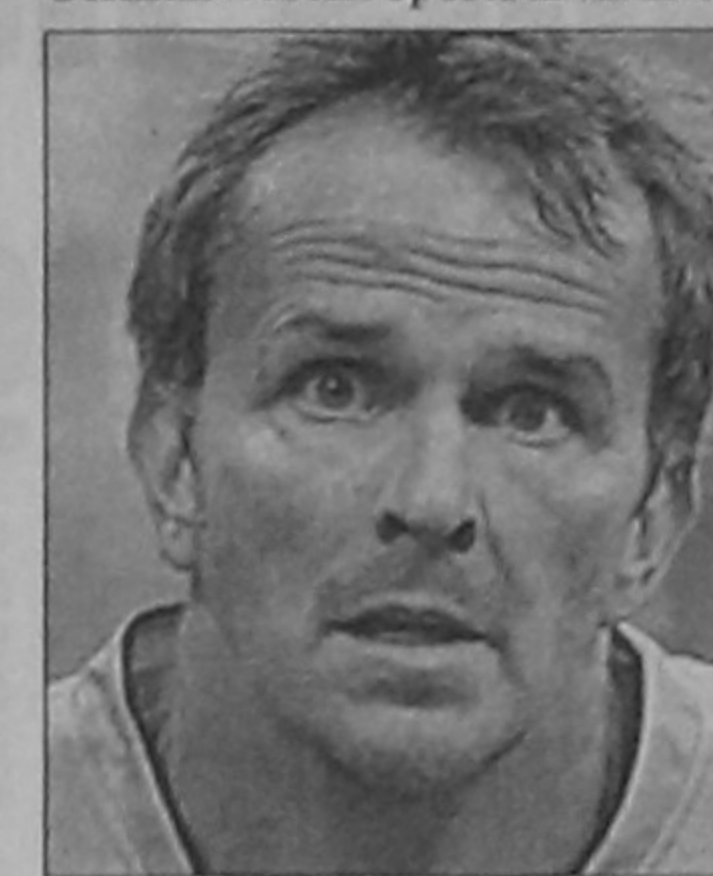
Takeovers is the future

Football

AFP, Manchester
Manchester City midfielder Dietmar Hamann says the partial takeover of the Premier League club by a rich investor is the future of European football.
Sulaiman al-Fahim has invested heavily in Manchester City since he bought Brazilian Robinho from Spanish giants Real Madrid for 42 million euros (59 million US dollars) on Monday September 1.
Fahim, one of the wealthiest men in the world, has made no secret of his desire to make City bigger than Real Madrid and Manchester United.
Manchester United and Chelsea contested this year's Champions League final and both joined Liverpool in the semifinals of the previous season.
Hamann says with Premier League clubs supported by exceptionally wealthy businessmen, such as Roman Abramovich at Chelsea and Malcolm Glazer at

Football

Manchester United, English clubs will only continue to dominate in Europe.
"That is the model for the future," the 35-year-old told German website Sport 1 in an interview.
"If the fans here are overjoyed, it can only be a good thing for the players and the club."
"But if things continue, the gap between Germany and England,



DIETMAR HAMANN

Spain and Italy will only grow wider.
"English teams have dominated the Champions League in recent years and will probably continue to do so," he said.
Hamann, who won the last of his 59 Germany caps in 2005, says Bundesliga clubs would make an attractive investment, but "few businessmen will pay 49 per cent for a football club, but have no say in how the side is run."
In the Bundesliga, only Bayern Munich have the financial resources to recruit big name stars on salaries competitive with the rest of Europe.
And Hamann says there is a real danger the price paid for players and the salaries they are paid could explode in the coming months with clubs willing to hand control to foreign investors to buy Premier League success.
Manchester City are reportedly interested in signing both German strikers Lukas Podolski, from Bayern Munich, and Stuttgart's Mario Gomez with a host of other stars set to join.

Death does not part them

Football

INTERNET, Hamburg
"HSV forever and ever," is the anthem of German Bundesliga soccer club SV Hamburg, or HSV. Now fans can be true to their team after death. Europe's first cemetery for football supporters opened Tuesday in the port city, just a stone's throw from the club's home ground, the Nordbank Arena.
The final resting place offers fans who have left their earthly life the chance "to hear how a match has ended," said Christian Reichert, the club official responsible for fan affairs.
The cemetery, which took one year to lay out, allows deceased supporters "a feeling of being present," even after death, Reichert added.
Located within a larger ceme-

tery, the grave plots are modelled on a soccer stadium, with a concrete goal guarding the entrance. The grass used to be part of the Nordbank Arena's football pitch.
Among the different types of funeral services on offer is one with the club anthem played during the burial, or the use of a blue coffin painted in the diamond-shaped HSV logo.
The undertaker who arranges the services chose the slogan "True passion knows no final whistle" to advertise his football burial package.
He also promises that the coffins will be covered with "soil that has been played on" when they are lowered into the ground.
"The first funeral will take place here in the next few days," he added. There have already been 20 firm enquiries from fans ranging in age from 28 to 80.
HSV board member Horst

Eberstein, 79, says he is keen to secure a spot for himself in the fan cemetery. But one of the club's most famous players, Uwe Seeler, dislikes the idea.
"If there are supporters who want that, it's fine with me, but maybe that's a bit too much," said the former striker.
There are enough plots to accommodate up to 500 fans. Club officials say the only other cemetery of its kind was opened by Argentina's Boca Juniors last year. But unlike the South American site, the Hamburg one is within close distance of the stadium.
The idea came about because Germany's strict funeral laws prohibit the scattering of ashes on playing fields as is practised in the Netherlands.
Regulations also do not allow the burial of urns along the sidelines as is possible at the ground of English Premiership club Everton.

Paraguay on cruise control

AFP, Auncion

Paraguay consolidated top position in the 10-team South American zone qualifier for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa with a comfortable 2-0 win over struggling Venezuela on Tuesday.
First half goals from Cristian Riveros after 29 minutes and Nelson Haedo after 45 minutes were enough to assure a further three points for the home team in front of 35,000 fans at the Defensores del Chaco stadium.
Venezuela had little but stub-

born defence to offer and were fortunate not to lose by a wider margin in the final minutes of the game.
Riveros stabbed the ball in from close range after 28 minutes when he was quick to react after Claudio Morel Rodriguez's low pass into the area deflected off a Venezuela defender.
Paraguay's second goal came when Julio Manzur's long clearance out of defence was headed on by Roque Santa Cruz into the path of the unmarked Haedo Valdez, who placed his shot under Renny Vega.
The win puts Paraguay on 17 points from eight games, five points clear of Brazil and

Argentina who are tied for second place on 12 points but have each a game in hand.
Both are expected to close the gap to two points with wins on Wednesday. Brazil play host to bottom dogs Bolivia, while Argentina travel to Peru who are second from bottom.
The other games on Wednesday see Chile take on Colombia at home and Uruguay play Ecuador in Montevideo.
The top four teams automatically qualify for the World Cup finals, while the fifth-placed team will go into a playoff against a team from the CONCACAF north and central America zone.



PHOTO: AFP

Paraguay striker Nelson Valdez is ecstatic after scoring against Venezuela during their World Cup qualifying match against Venezuela at the Defensores del Chaco in Asuncion on Tuesday.