

## Ljungberg sets sail for MLS

INTERNET, undated

Former Arsenal and West Ham midfielder Freddie Ljungberg is set to join MLS side Seattle Sounders, according to reports in his homeland.

The former Sweden international is rumoured to have signed a two-year deal and Seattle Sounders have announced that a press conference will take place on Tuesday afternoon where they will unveil a new star player.

Ljungberg's agent, Claes Elefalk, has landed in the US but has not confirmed that his client is with him.

He told Aftonbladet: "We have no comments to the press today. I have nothing to say more than something is going to happen soon."

The MLS clubs have a contract limit but the move will be made possible due to the 'designated player rule' that was announced when David Beckham signed for LA Galaxy.

Ljungberg made a name for himself at Arsenal who he signed for in 1998 where he gained the reputation as a goal-scoring midfielder.

He left the Gunners in 2007 and joined West Ham United, but failed to hit his previous heights at Upton Park and would join goalkeeper Kasey Keller, midfielder Sanna Nyassi and forward Sébastien Le Toux as the first four players on the Sounders FC roster for the inaugural season, which begins in March 2009.

Sounders FC general manager Adrian Hanauer declined to comment and the team would not confirm the report, although rumors of the club's interest in Ljungberg have circled for several weeks.

## Maldini adds his voice

SOCERNET

AC Milan captain Paolo Maldini has defended David Beckham's motivations for wanting to join the Rossoneri in the winter transfer window.

The England midfielder is negotiating a short loan move to the Italian giants from the Los Angeles Galaxy during the MLS off-season.

Beckham claims his main reason for wanting to play a few months in Serie A next year is to maintain his fitness and not just to earn more England call-ups.

"Beckham is coming here to train, to remain in good form and to still be an important part of his national team," Maldini said.

"I feel they are all positive motivations."

"Milan has no reservations signing veteran players and has always taken into account the image and communication factors."

"As long as you have image and technical values together, all is well."

The 33-year-old Beckham would join a star-studded team, featuring Brazilian playmakers Kaka and Ronaldinho among others.

However, Maldini has warned that name alone does not guarantee success, as was evident at Beckham's former club, Real Madrid.

Madrid's policy of signing a 'galactico' at the start of each season backfired, with the club going three campaigns without winning the title from 2004 to 2006.

"The important thing (to remember) is that a team of 'galacticos' does not prevail," Maldini added.

"If we were to fail again this year it would be a disaster."

## Ronaldinho, Flamini out

AFP, Rome

AC Milan pair Ronaldinho and Mathieu Flamini are out of the club's Wednesday night match against Siena at the San Siro, the team's doctor said Monday.

Both players came off injured against Atalanta on Sunday and need a few days rest, according to Massimo Manara.

"(Ronaldinho) has twisted his knee. He underwent some tests today (Monday) and in the afternoon he will have an X-ray," he said. "I think he needs a couple of days of rest."

(Flamini) arrived today with a problem with his thigh muscle. We need to keep him under observation for two or three days of rest."

On the hand, centre-backs Philippe Senderos and Kakha Kaladze are close to returning to action following injuries but may have to wait until Sunday.

## Tony Adams for Pompey?

Football

SOCERNET

Portsmouth are set to unveil Tony Adams as their new manager following Harry Redknapp's departure for Tottenham Hotspur.

Adams, who has been Redknapp's assistant for the last two years, had been tipped to land the job as Portsmouth look for consistency.

The former Wycombe Wanderers boss will be paraded in front of the media at a 1pm press conference.

Earlier today Redknapp backed Tony Adams and Joe Jordan to take charge of the club.

"Tony and Joe are both terrific football men," said the 61-year-old. "Whoever takes the job, they've got a good group of players there."

But Pompey officials were sure to have been impressed by the public backing given to Adams at the Fulham match when fans soon chanted "Tony Adams blue and white army".

managerial experience came with Wycombe between 2003-04. The Chairboys were relegated after he took over in November 2003, though they were already marooned at the foot of the table when he arrived. Despite a good start to the 2004/05 League Two season their form dipped and he resigned after just 12 months in charge.

Before joining Pompey as Redknapp's assistant, Adams spent time in Dutch football. Firstly, he was at Feyenoord as youth coach for six months before spending two weeks at FC Utrecht.

Former Bolton and Newcastle boss Sam Allardyce and former Chelsea chief Avram Grant - who went to Stamford Bridge from the job of technical director at Fratton Park - were believed to be among the favourites to take over from Redknapp.

It's a great job for one of the boys to take, I brought them to the club, they're great lads. I only wish Portsmouth every success."

Former Arsenal and England skipper Adams' only previously

He is believed to have made it known to close friends that he could walk out if not given the opportunity now.

Meanwhile, Portsmouth chief executive Peter Storrie is optimistic about the future of the club despite the departure of Redknapp.

Moving to quell concerns, Storrie told the Daily Mail: "Losing Harry Redknapp has hit Portsmouth hard but the football club are not about to collapse in the wake of his departure. Far from it."

The club will continue to make progress and Sacha Gaydamak remains committed to building on the success we enjoyed under Harry.

"Our owner will continue to support the club financially and there will soon be good news with regard to the new stadium and training ground."

Storrie expects work on a new 9 million pound training facility to start next month for use next summer while the date for the new stadium is pencilled in for August 2011.

## Goals not the sole judge

AFP, Manchester

Cristiano Ronaldo insists he should not be judged by how many goals he scores as Manchester United prepare to take on West Ham at Old Trafford.

An ankle operation before this season began has meant Ronaldo has yet to rediscover the devastating form that saw him score 42 goals to help United to the Champions League and Premier League titles last term.

The 23-year-old winger has managed three goals since returning to action in mid-September.

But while he would welcome a repeat of last season's achievements, Ronaldo is adamant his contribution should not be measured simply by how many times he puts the ball in the back of the net.

"I am an ambitious player. I try to improve every season. I know last year was magnificent. I played really well, I scored so many goals and we won major trophies," said the Portugal winger.

"It is possible this season. But my priority is not only to score goals. I don't have to do that. I just have to play well for the team."

"I want to do the same as last season. I don't need to prove anything to anyone. I just want to keep proving to myself that I am a good player."

Despite being denied a pre-season move to Real Madrid, Ronaldo maintains anyone claiming his body language shows he is unhappy is wide of the mark.

"If I smile it is because I smile. If I don't, it's because I don't. People are always writing things about me."

"It is up to them; for me it is not a problem. I will just try to play well and do my best. I am just focused on playing good football."

Rio Ferdinand has revealed that Ronaldo's desire to win even stretches to table tennis and believes his hunger is key to the forward's success.

"He wants to learn and be the best in whatever he does, even in table tennis against me! You need that."

"All the top players have a winning mentality. They want to do well all the time, even in training. Last season and the season before he was faultless."

"He had an end product and was doing things other people cannot do."

It promises to be a tough battle when third-placed Hamburg host fourth-placed VfB Stuttgart.

Frankfurt have nine players on the injury list, the biggest name being Greek striker Ioannis Amanatidis, while Bayern are without striker Luca Toni (rib injury) and defender Philipp Lahm (ankle).

With all 18 teams in action either Tuesday or Wednesday night, league leaders Hoffenheim travel to the top three when they travel to face struggling Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Those were big points we took against Bochum. Especially considering the up-coming games, that was an important win," said VfB mid-fielder Roberto Hilbert.

On Tuesday night, Werder Bremen can welcome back Germany defender Per Mertesacker when they host Bayer Leverkusen.

In the next week Bremen face three successive home games against Bayer, Hertha Berlin and Panathinaikos (in the Champions League), but Bremen are well aware they need wins after four draws in nine Bundesliga games.

"We are not careless," said general manager Klaus Allofs. "We are not happy about the fact that we have taken so few points."

The apology has taken the edge off the conflict. And at least it has now been clarified that the mistake clearly lay with our captain," Zwanziger told the online version of Die Welt newspaper.

"Now we certainly have to face the question: How reasonable is Michael Ballack? Is the apology only tactics or is it really meant honestly?"

Low last week summoned Ballack for one-to-one talks after being "disappointed" at comments made in a newspaper interview.

Ballack had suggested to the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung that Low had been disrespectful in his recent treatment of Frings and Kuranyi.

The Chelsea man also signalled his intention to say sorry to Low in person when he had recovered from a foot operation and was fit to travel to Germany.

But DFB chief Theo Zwanziger fears Ballack's actions could be just a ploy to avoid being stripped of the captaincy.

The game will be as interesting for who is left behind as it is for its

## Kop can afford to dream

AFP, London

Liverpool fans may not know whether to laugh or cry now that former captain turned football pundit Alan Hansen has said this season represents the best chance for their first title since 1990.

It was the former Scotland central defender who, after all, once famously stated "you win nothing with kids" only for Manchester United's youthful team to promptly win the 1996 Premier League and FA Cup double.

"Harry made his mind up. He has gone and we now have to carry on with our good work at this club. We have started something and we need to finish it," said Portsmouth defender Sylvain Distin.

Chelsea would, ordinarily, be huge favourites to win away at Hull. But the newly-promoted Tigers have surprised everyone, and possibly themselves, by rising to third in the table.

"If you get 20 points from nine games you are going to be somewhere near the top," Hull manager Phil Brown said. "It is Champions League form but that is what it is, form. That is temporary."

Manchester United, eight points adrift of Liverpool, will look to claw back ground against struggling West Ham after the disappointment of a 1-1 draw away to Everton.

Tottenham responded to the Redknapp factor by beating Bolton for their first league win this season.

Nevertheless a home victory this season over champions United and last weekend's 1-0 triumph away to Chelsea, which ended the Blues' 86-match unbeaten Premier League run at Stamford Bridge, will leave many Liverpool supporters thinking 'if not now, when?'

Liverpool are yet to lose in the Premier League this season and are four points clear at the top of the table.

An Anfield match against managerless Portsmouth, still reeling from the shock departure of Harry Redknapp to Tottenham, should present few problems to Liverpool in their current form.

It is just these kinds of fixtures which can trip up the unwary title aspirant, particularly after the euphoria of a win over a major rival.

However, Hansen said: "Rafael Benitez's side had the steel to go with their undoubted skill."

"They may have dropped points at home to Stoke but winning the title is not all about thrashing teams every week but how teams respond to setbacks," said Hansen.

"That's the big test and from the Liverpool performances so far this season, the players have shown the

kind of resilience that suggests they would bounce back from any poor result with great spirit."

Portsmouth responded to Redknapp's exit by drawing 1-1 at home to Fulham on Sunday and for all the speculation surrounding their future, they, unlike many a managerless side, do have the consolation of lying seventh in the top flight.

"Harry made his mind up. He has gone and we now have to carry on with our good work at this club. We have started something and we need to finish it," said Portsmouth defender Sylvain Distin.

But Gunners and England star Theo Walcott said the way in which Arsenal, now four points off the lead, won 2-0 away to West Ham last weekend was a sign of their ability to do the "dirty things" required to take the title.

"Sometimes people say that we do not do all the dirty things, which we did during the first half (against West Ham), and that frustrated them at times," Walcott said.

"It goes to show that we do not just play pretty football and we can put our foot in when it has to be done."

No side managed by the talkative Martin O'Neill can ever quite be said to be doing anything by stealth but Aston Villa's rise to fifth in the table and last weekend's 4-0 win over Wigan have gone largely unremarked.

Villa will look to build on that position at home to Blackburn while Manchester City, buoyed by Robinho's hat-trick against Stoke City, travel to Middlesbrough.

Sunderland, fresh from a first home win over Newcastle in 28 years, are away to Stoke, currently occupying the final relegation place.

Wednesday also sees two clashes between teams hovering above the drop zone with Bolton at home to Everton and Fulham facing Wigan.

## FIXTURES

Wednesday (1945GMT unless stated):

Arsenal v Tottenham, Aston Villa v Blackburn, Bolton v Everton (2000GMT), Fulham v Wigan, Hull v Chelsea, Liverpool v Portsmouth (2000GMT), Manchester United v West Ham (2000GMT), Middlesbrough v Sunderland (2000GMT), Stoke v Manchester City (2000GMT), Stoke v Sunderland

AFP, Rome

What should be an intriguing top of the table clash at the Stadio Artemio Franchi between Fiorentina and Inter Milan on Wednesday is being overshadowed by the spectre of fairplay.

Although Fiorentina are fifth and Inter second, the visitors are level on points with top placed Udinese and the hosts trail both teams by only a single point.

They have won their last four Serie A matches; however a year ago in the corresponding fixture at a similar time of the season, the two teams were also at the top but Inter won comfortably 2-0 and demonstrated they were a league above La Viola.

That performance provoked an impromptu rugby-style guard of honour as Fiorentina players formed two lines and clapped the Inter players off the pitch.

The Fiorentina name then became synonymous with fairplay, so it is ironic that this time around they enter the fixture under a fairplay cloud.

Fiorentina could well be without striker Alberto Gilardino, who coped a two-game ban for scoring

## FIXTURES

AC Milan v Siena, Bologna v Juventus, Catania v Udinese, Chievo v Lazio, Fiorentina v Inter Milan, Hull v Napoli v Cagliari, Lecce v Palermo, Genoa v Reggina, AS Roma v Sampdoria, Torino v Atalanta

they still have an incentive to do well in the group matches," said Suzuki.

The AFC is attempting to make football in the region more professional and has laid down tough new rules for entry into the 2009 Champions League.

Leagues wishing to take part have had to satisfy the governing body that they meet certain standards regarding team affairs, attendances, marketing, stadiums, and media arrangements.

Fourth-placed AC Milan, who host Siena, and third-placed Napoli, who host lowly Reggina, could also both finish the day as