

Ljunberg 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 Sebastian Le Toux as the first four players on 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

SOCCERNET

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 Atlanta 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

SOCCERNET

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."

"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

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.

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".

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 Storr is optimistic about the future of the club despite the departure of Redknapp.

Moving to quell concerns, Storr 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."

Storr 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.

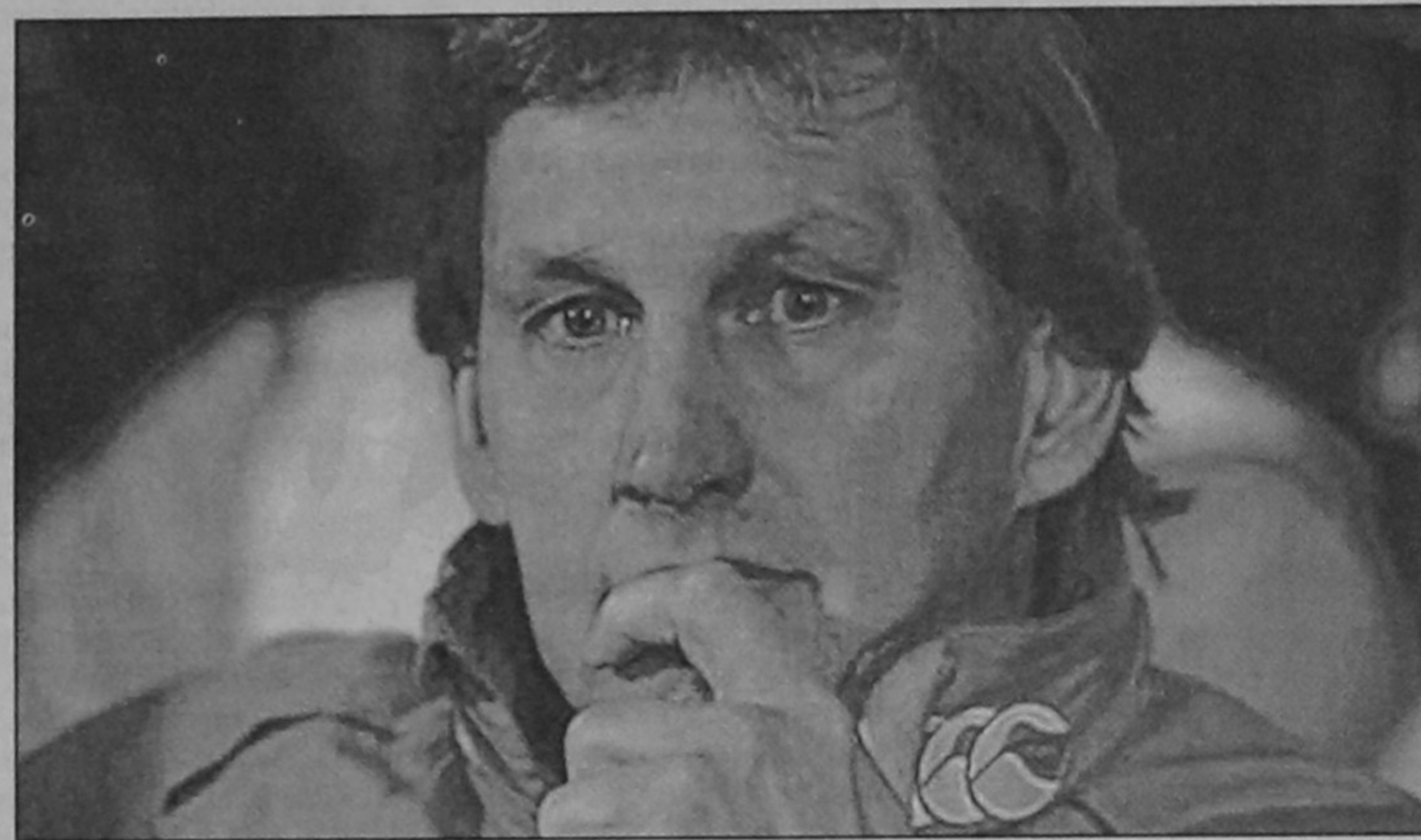


PHOTO: INTERNET

Arsenal legend Tony Adams looks all set to plug the hole at Portsmouth following Harry Redknapp's departure to Tottenham.

Top three is Bayern's goal

AFP, Berlin



After climbing up from 11th to 5th in the Bundesliga last weekend, defending champions Bayern Munich aim to break into the top three when they travel to face struggling Eintracht Frankfurt on Wednesday.

Jürgen Klinsmann-coached Bayern fought back from 2-0 down against Wolfsburg in Munich on Saturday to claim a 4-2 win which dramatically altered their league standing after a poor run of results last month.

The win over Wolfsburg was their third consecutive win and Wednesday night's trip to injury-ravaged Frankfurt is a chance for them to pick up three more points as the German giants look to be top of the table by Christmas.

"It's vital we keep it going now," said Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge on the Bayern website.

"We're not over the mountain yet, but our aim is to reach the

summit. Our target, and I'll make no secret of this, is to be top of the table by Christmas, and we have to continue with that in mind."

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 strugglers Bochum on Wednesday looking to build on their impressive 3-0 win over title rivals Hamburg at home last Sunday.

Boasting the league's top scorer in striker David Ibsen, who scored his tenth goal at the weekend, coach Ralf Rangnick has virtually a full-strength squad

to choose from against Bochum who are just above the relegation zone. It promises to be a tough battle when third-placed Hamburg host fourth-placed VfB Stuttgart.

Martin Jol's Hamburg are licking their wounds from the Hoffenheim defeat, while Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez scored twice in the last ten minutes against Bochum on Sunday.

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

"We allowed Genoa to have an easy afternoon and two or three of my players weren't at their best."

"Maybe the Genoa coach has a greater ability to influence his players' mentality than that of Inter, hence I have to show my players that there is only one chief here. I'll leave two or three players at home on Wednesday."

"Maybe some people don't know me yet and they will start to on Tuesday when we tell them who's been selected."

"It's easy to understand who will be left out, you just need to watch this match."

"With me those who think only about themselves and not about the team don't play."

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."

DFB question Ballack motives

INTERNET, undated

The president of the German Football Association has questioned the motives behind Michael Ballack's apology to national coach Joachim Low.

The Chelsea midfielder released a statement on Saturday in which he admitted criticising Low's treatment of Torsten Frings and Kevin Kuranyi in a recent interview had been a mistake.

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 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 the 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.

Low was incensed his skipper had used the media to criticise him and threatened to strip him of the national team captaincy.

Zwanziger has spoken with Low and Germany manager Oliver Bierhoff about Ballack over the past few days.

"We discussed what the explanation means and questioned whether with it everything is now sorted," he headed.

"Joachim Low does not see it like that and I also don't see it like that."

"We have to exactly scrutinise what intentions lie behind the statements, and at the end of the talk it has to be guaranteed that nothing like this will happen again."

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.

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.

But 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 topflight.

"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.

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 Manchester City (2000GMT), Stoke v Sunderland	

Top of the table clash

AFP, Rome



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.

Either side in Florence could end the day looking down on everyone else.

From a footballing perspective it should be a fascinating tie, particularly given Inter boss Jose Mourinho's dissatisfaction with certain players in Sunday's 0-0 home draw against Genoa.

Mourinho has vowed to leave two or three players out of the squad to teach them an important lesson: it's his way or the highway.

The former Chelsea boss claimed certain players, without naming names, were playing for themselves and not for the team and were failing to follow his instructions.

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

own outcome.

The other interest on the playing side will be to see just how far Fiorentina have come in the last 12 months and whether or not Cesare Prandelli's young team are ready to challenge for the title.

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 copped a two game ban for scoring

WEDNESDAY (1945GMT unless stated):	
AC Milan v Siena, Bologna v Juventus, Catania v Udinese, Chievo v Lazio, Fiorentina v Inter Milan, Genoa v Cagliari, Lecce v Palermo, Napoli v Reggina, AS Roma v Sampdoria, Torino v Atalanta	

ACL to be revamped

Football

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

The AFC Champions League received a huge boost Tuesday with prize money for next season's revamped tournament massively increased to 14 million dollars.

Asia's top club competition will be expanded from 28 to 32 teams in 2009, but with stricter criteria for participation in an effort to raise standards.

Tokuaki Suzuki, deputy chief of the AFC's Professional League Project, said the extra money on offer would provide clubs with the motivation to meet the new requirements to compete.

"The new budget means there is much, much more revenue for clubs participating in the tournament," Suzuki said at an AFC managers seminar here.

"This will give clubs the incentive to be more professional so they meet the requirements to take part in the competition."

The total budget for 2009 is 20 million dollars, dwarfing the 4.0 million available for this year's event.

Of that, 70 per cent is dedicated to prize money and incentives, with the eventual winners taking home 1.5 million dollars plus bonuses from earlier rounds.

With a victory in the group stages worth 40,000 dollars, a club is able to make up to 2.25 million dollars if they win all their matches.

"This means that even if a team cannot qualify for the round of 16,

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.

So far only 11 countries have made the grade, with just one -- Japan's J-League -- satisfying all criteria.

Mohamed Reza Saket, managing director of Iran's top club Sepahan, lauded the move to fully commercialise the Asian showpiece.

"It definitely motivates all the clubs to put in more efforts," said Saket, whose side lost in the final last year to Japan's Urawa Reds.

"The players, coaches and whoever else is involved can benefit from the prizes. Anyone with common sense knows that success now pays and this will unite all behind a club's efforts."

"There will be no dead match from now on. You come to win even if it is your last group match and you have no hope of qualifying for the next round."

Hirotoshi Nitta, managing director of Urawa Reds, said Japanese clubs would play a central role in the success of the new AFC Champions League.

"J-League clubs have a central

But false dawns have become a feature of life at White Hart Lane and a tougher test lies in wait on Wednesday in the shape of a north London derby away to Arsenal - a match that could be made all the harder if second-bottom Newcastle win at home to West Brom on Tuesday.

"If there is no chance of winning then we may as well stay at home," said a bullish Redknapp.

There remains a perception that Arsenal can be carried out of their elegant passing stride by straightforward physical aggression.

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.

a goal with his arm in Sunday's 3-1 win at Palermo but are due to have an appeal against it heard on Tuesday.

Gilardino has been penalised after a disciplinary panel decided to look into the matter, viewed TV evidence and judged him to have deliberately knocked the ball into the net with his arm - in his defence he was being manhandled to the ground by a Palermo defender at the time.

It sets a dangerous and bizarre precedent.

If a player can be banned on video evidence for cheating then anyone who gets away with a deliberate foul, handball or infringement of any kind during a game should then be banned after a trial by TV following the game.

While that row is likely to rumble on, there is another top of the table clash taking place in Sicily where sixth placed Catania, just two points off the top, take on the leaders.

Fourth-placed AC Milan, who host Siena, and third-placed Napoli, who host lowly Reggina, could also both finish the day as leaders if they win and results go their way.

Struggling AS Roma will try to kick start their woeful season when they tackle Sampdoria at home.

and key role to contribute to the improvement of Asian football," he told reporters.

"The J-League has been a pacesetter in Asia and we (the clubs) can share our successful experience with others."

The final of this year's event will be held next month and features Australia's Adelaide United and Japan's Gamba Osaka.

Gilardino gets two-match ban

AFP, Rome

Fiorentina are to appeal the two match ban handed out to Italian international striker Alberto Gilardino for the goal he scored with his forearm in his side's 3-1 victory over Serie A rivals Palermo on Sunday.

Gilardino, the leading scorer in Serie A this season with seven goals, scored the goal in the 20th minute of their match, however, the referee did not see the infringement but television images did show him using his forearm.

According to a sports judge Gilardino intentionally touched the ball with his hand in what was a "seriously unsporting gesture".