

Van der Sar delighted at new deal

AFP, Yokohama

Veteran Manchester United goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar says he is delighted to have signed a new contract and didn't think twice before putting pen to paper.

The contract extension will see the Dutchman remain at Old Trafford until June 2010, taking him up to what is likely to be the end of his epic playing career.

"It was not difficult at all," van der Sar said. "It's a great club to be at, with a great atmosphere in the dressing room, the boss is fantastic and we have the best stadium in England."

"I've enjoyed every minute of the three-and-a-half years I've been here so far and I'm really looking forward to playing for another season after this one."

The goalkeeper, 38, arrived at Old Trafford from Fulham in 2005 and was a key figure in United's back-to-back Premier League titles and last season's Champions League victory.

Ben Foster and Tomasz Kuszczak are currently back-up goalkeepers and Sir Alex Ferguson will decide which one will be his number two during the close season.

Van der Sar is in Japan with the team this week to play in the Club World Cup.

City lose Benjani

AFP, Manchester

Mark Hughes, the Manchester City manager, admits Zimbabwe striker Benjani Mwaruware could be out of action for "a number of weeks" because of a hamstring problem.

The former Portsmouth forward was replaced at half-time during Saturday's 1-0 home Premier League loss to Everton here at Eastlands.

"We're a little bit light on numbers at the moment," Hughes told City's official website.

"A number of the guys are carrying injuries, so that will have an impact, and that's difficult when you've got games coming up thick and fast; you have to have a fit and able squad," the former Manchester United forward added.

"At the moment we're just struggling a little bit in that respect."

"We've lost Benjani again at the weekend with a hamstring and he'll probably be out for a number of weeks. We're a bit threadbare."

City, despite the backing of their wealthy Abu Dhabi consortium owners, are only currently above the relegation zone on goal difference alone.

However, they are widely expected to spend heavily during the January transfer window.

'Real can bounce back'

AFP, Madrid



Reigning Spanish champions Real Madrid can bounce back despite being 12 points adrift of leaders Barcelona after their weekend loss to the Catalan giants, Real's new coach Juande Ramos said Monday.

"I am totally convinced that we can recover the 12 points," Ramos said in an interview published in sports daily As two days after Real's 2-0 loss away to Barcelona, his first league match since taking over Real last week.

"We will not give up on anything. My formula is clear. We are going to win, win, win, without thinking about Barcelona," he added.

The former Sevilla and Tottenham coach said Real would be more competitive in January when the club has new signing and key players return from injury.

"Clearly we want a right winger and a central midfielder. The club is working to find them and I hope they arrive soon. I want players of quality and desire who are

ready to play," he said.

"I have only been working here a week, but I can say that injuries have already had an effect on the backbone of the team," he added.

Pepe, Gabriel Heinze, Mahamadou Diarra, Arjen Robben and Ruud van Nistelrooy are among the Real players who are currently sidelined.

Ramos started his term as coach at Real with a 3-0 win over Zenit St. Petersburg in their final Champions League Group H game on Wednesday.

Spanish media however said Monday that it would take a "miracle" for Real to catch up to an in-form Barcelona who are eight points ahead of their nearest rivals, second-placed Valencia.

Real will face Valencia at home on Saturday in their last match before the winter break.

In preparation for the match Ramos has scheduled two daily training sessions -- in the morning and the afternoon. His German predecessor Bernd Schuster had only held one training session per day this season.

Both Barcelona and Real have qualified for the last 16 of the Champions League and await the draw on December 19.

Rooney not punished

AFP, Nyon

Wayne Rooney has escaped a sanction from European football's ruling body UEFA following an alleged stamp in a Champions League match last week.

The Manchester United striker had been accused of stamping on Aalborg's Kasper Risgaard during a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford last week.

However after reviewing video evidence UEFA said Monday that no charges would be brought against Rooney.

A spokesman said: "UEFA will not open any disciplinary proceedings against Wayne Rooney."

It means the England star, who on Monday was given the backing of national team manager Fabio Capello, will be available for United as they enter the knockout stages of Europe's premier club competition.

Govou held for drunk driving

AFP, Lyon

French international midfielder Sidney Govou was held in a police station overnight Sunday after he was found to be over the limit while driving following the 0-0 draw with Marseille.

The 29-year-old was found to have a level of 2.6 grammes per litre of blood when the police stopped him.

Govou was held in a cell till the end of Monday morning before going before a magistrate.

Diarra going to Bernabeu

AFP, Madrid

Portsmouth's French international midfielder Lassana Diarra is close to signing with Real Madrid, Spanish sports newspapers reported Tuesday.

Real has been on the lookout for a defensive midfielder since Mali international Mahamadou Diarra was last week sidelined for the rest of the season after undergoing knee surgery.

The Spanish champions hope to confirm the transfer of Lassana Diarra, who has also played for Chelsea and Arsenal, from the English Premier League side in the "next 48 hours," the AS newspaper said.

A rival sports newspaper Marca said Lassana Diarra is the "best placed" to replace his namesake at Real.

It said the transfer fee for the 23-year-old could be around 10 million euros.

Ferguson rubbishes 39th game

AFP, Yokohama

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson on Tuesday rubbished the idea of a 39th Premier League game played in Asia, saying he does not believe it will ever happen.

The controversial proposals were first flagged earlier this year but were slammed by Asian football chiefs who argued it would adversely affect their own countries' domestic competitions.

But since then the idea has been gaining support in the region, with AFC President Mohamed Bin Hammam recently saying he was now firmly in favour.

But Ferguson, who criticised the idea when it first emerged, again strongly condemned it when asked to comment on the sidelines of the Club World Cup.

"I don't think there will ever be a 39th game and I don't believe there should be. I certainly am not in favour of it," he said, citing too many games already.

"You look at our domestic programme allied to our cup competitions. It is impossible."

Asian cities touted as possible venues when the idea was first floated included Bangkok, Beijing, Hong Kong, Melbourne and Singapore.



Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson holds a FIFA Club World Cup flag at a press conference in Yokohama on Tuesday.

Fergie defends Club WC

AFP, Yokohama

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson came to the defence of the Club World Cup Tuesday, calling it a prestigious tournament that was important for his team to win.

There has been criticism in the British press that the long trip to Japan mid-season for a tournament of continental champions was a pointless exercise that could derail their Premier League campaign.

Ferguson admitted jet lag would be a problem, both here and against Stoke City back home on December 26, but insisted it was all part of being successful.

"This tournament can add prestige to a football club which is why we are here and why we want to win," he said at a news conference ahead of their semifinal against Japan's Gamba Osaka Thursday.

"I think it is mainly the media in Britain who don't take this tournament as seriously as we do."

"The nitty gritty is that we could look back in 30 years and say that Manchester United was the world champion and that is what this club is about and that is why it is

important for us to win it."

United will have to catch up two games with their main Premiership rivals on their return to Britain on December 22, but the Scot said the trip to Japan could also have its benefits.

"Playing different types of opposition will certainly do us no harm, but the big incentive is to win the world championship," he said.

"We can win that in December but we can't win the Premiership in December. Yes, it is a relative handicap but that is what happens when you are successful."

"We are here as champions of Europe and I hope to be here again in Abu Dhabi next year."

The Club World Cup moves to the United Arab Emirates next year for two years before returning to Japan in 2011.

In 1999 United won the annual Intercontinental Cup, which was contested between the European and South American champions before it became the Club World Cup, a development Ferguson said was good for the game.

"This tournament has grown because, with countries like Japan, South Korea and China developing on the football side, there needed to be a better balance," he said.

"It is an extra game for us and the South American team but the prestige attached to it is now even greater."

Darren Fletcher said he was excited at the prospect of bringing more silverware to Old Trafford, but admitted the team were battling jetlag.

United only arrived on Monday afternoon following their 0-0 draw with Spurs on Saturday and must be ready to play on Thursday.

"We are doing the best we can to prepare but the jetlag does have an effect," he said.

"Lack of sleep will affect anyone's performance but dealing with it is part of the challenge."

"Obviously, the opposition will have a huge advantage in that respect but we will prepare as best as we can. The general feeling is that everyone is not too bad at the moment and hopefully we will be alright for the match."

Michael Carrick added that despite the long trip, everyone was motivated to win.

"The tournament is hard enough to qualify for in the first place, so we'll be doing all we can to win the trophy," he said.

"It's a great opportunity for us to represent Europe and it'll be a great experience for all the players."

Spurs plan new stadium

AFP, London

Tottenham Hotspur gave their fans a glimpse of the future by revealing the first images on Monday of the club's proposed new 60,000-seater stadium.

The Northumberland Development Project, a large-scale development incorporating leisure facilities, public space and housing as well as the new stadium which is sited near the Premier League club's existing north London home at White Hart Lane.

Spurs, who have a season-ticket waiting list of around 22,000, are conscious of the need for a larger stadium than White Hart Lane, which holds just over 36,000 but were

equally keen to stay close to their roots.

Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy stressed the new stadium would put "fan experience first".

He added: "The brief I gave the architects was to design an iconic stadium that would be one of the best in Europe. My overriding priority is to re-create the terrific atmosphere we have at the current stadium, within a world class stadium that offers state-of-the-art facilities."

"This means designing a stadium which has supporters as close as possible to the field of play and not simply looking to chase headline capacity."

"Our fans will find themselves closer to the pitch than at any other comparable stadium in the UK. This design puts fan experience first."

The new stadium will also benefit from

a club museum, shops and homes.

The plans will enable the team to remain at the current site throughout construction. Spurs are due to submit a formal planning application next year.

Last month, Tottenham announced that revenue was up from 103 million pounds (130m euros) to 114.8m with net debt of 14.6m at the end of the financial year - though that figure includes property acquisitions.

On the field, things have been looking up for Spurs since the October arrival of former Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp.

From being on the road to relegation Spurs, who held English and European champions Manchester United to a goalless draw last weekend, are 15th in the table although they are currently just a point above the drop zone.



A handout computer generated image obtained from Tottenham Hotspur football club shows the club's proposed new stadium design on Monday.