City increase Kaka bid

Football

AFP, London

AC Milan's Brazilian star Kaka will Monday examine the megadeal which Premiership bigspenders Manchester City are dangling in front of him before deciding if he wants to make the most expensive move in footballing history, The Times reported on Friday.

A day after the Italians said Kaka could talk to City, who are offering a deal worth up to 150 million euros - around a fifth of that for agents' fees - the report suggested the 26-year-old wanted a clause inserted that he could leave at the end of next season if the club failed to qualify for the Champions League.

City manager Mark Hughes meanwhile confirmed that negotiations were still under way after Milan revealed on Thursday that they had received a 'colossal' bid from City and said they would consider it.

Mediaset, the TV company founded by Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi, claimed City had bid 150 million euros (197.5 million dollars) for the former World Player of the Year and offered him a salary of 15 million euros (19.8 when City face Newcastle.

million dollars) a season.

"This is a delicate moment. There is an offer from Manchester City for Kaka and Milan are considering it," Milan TV presenter Mauro Suma said, but added the club had not agreed to let him go.

Also Thursday, Italian sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport claimed Milan had given City permission to talk to Kaka next Tuesday with City representative and notorious Iranian-born agent Kia Joorabchian making contact with Kaka's father and agent Bosco.

Kaka himself was quoted as saying that he was happy to stay at AC Milan if the club did not want to sell him, but he has given every indication in the past that he would love to play in the English Premiership at some stage in his career.

However, his spokesman Diogo Kotscho said money would not be the deciding factor.

Various British media reports Friday indicated that City's wealthy Arab owners were confident their offer will be accepted.

According to The Guardian, Hughes has already drawn up a new 4-1-4-1 formation to accommodate former world player of the year Kaka for a potential debut as early as January 28

throws, will provide another

testing examination of what-

Arsenal will have a point to

prove when they visit Hull,

made their first top flight

appearance at the Emirates

sign that Arsenal were unlikely

have been struggling to dispel

Sunderland on Saturday,

Chelsea, who are only a point

ahead of Villa in third place,

top four club.

Fulham.

On current form however,

At the bottom, the battle for

separating ninth-placed

Fulham from bottom side

West Brom, who will hope to

escape from the drop zone by

beating Middlesbrough at The

Sunday sees Tottenham host

manager Harry Redknapp's old

club Portsmouth while West

Ham take on London rivals

Hawthorns on Saturday.

They remain outside the

That setback was taken as a

opts for this weekend.

earlier in the season.

Injury trouble for MU

AFP, London



Just as it seemed things could not be going Serb. better for Manchester

United, a sudden flurry of injuries threatens to derail the champions' drive for a third straight Premier League title.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side head for Bolton on Saturday knowing three points will allow them to leapfrog Liverpool and top the table for at least the 48 hours before their rivals enter-Merseyside derby.

Bolton, hovering just above the relegation zone, would appear unlikely to interfere with that script, but United will travel to the Reebok Stadium without leading man Wayne Rooney and at least half their the lower echelons of English

first-choice back four. Patrice Evra (ankle) and Rio Ferdinand (back) will both definitely miss Saturday's match and Ferguson's defensive headache has been exacerbated by the injury suffered by back-up centreback Jonny Evans in Wednesday's 1-0 win overWigan.

With Wes Brown a longterm absentee, club captain Gary Neville could find himself pressed into action as an emergency centreback and Ferguson admits he is keeping his fingers crossed that Nemanja Vidic does not join his teammates in the treatmentroom.

The win over Wigan was United's ninth consecutive clean sheet and Ferguson hailed Vidic's outstanding form as the key to that run.

ever system Luiz Felipe Scolari "His reading of the game is excellent and he is as tough as

Rooney's absence should shock 2-1 winners when they give Carlos Tevez the chance to convince Ferguson that United should come up with the funds required to extend his current loan deal beyond the end of this season and to mount a credible title chalprevent the disgruntled lenge this season and they Argentina star from seeking a new challenge in Italy or that impression ever since.

Chelsea's morale was top four but, quietly, Arsene tain Everton in Monday's revived by a 4-1 FA Cup win at Wenger's side have put Southend in midweek but the together a run of seven mental scars created by last matches unbeaten in the weekend's 3-0 demolition at league over a period in which Old Trafford could be Hull's early season momenreopened when Stoke visit tum has all but disappeared. Stamford Bridge.

Saturday

v Stoke, Hull v Arsenal (1730 GMT) Manchester City v Wigan, Sunderland v Aston Villa, West Brom v Middlesbrough

Tottenham v Portsmouth (1600 GMT), West Ham v Fulham (1330

Monday

nails," the Scot said of big

Against sides residing in football's third tier, the Blues defensive fragility was exposed once more at Southend and it is certain that slipping up. Stoke, armed with Rory Delap's bullet-like long

(1500 GMT unless stated)

Bolton v Manchester Utd, Chelsea

Sunday

Liverpool v Everton (2000 GMT)

MOVE...

(1) Kaka and fellow Brazilian Ronaldinho, signed last summer from Barcelona, have not gelled as twin three-quarter players behind the striker in coach Carlo Ancelotti's favoured 4-3-2-1 formation;

(2) Milan want to bring back the 22year-old Yoann Gourcuff, who is on loan to Bordeaux, and plan to play him in Kaka's role; (3) Milan intend to extend David

Beckham's contract through to 2010 and want to use the Englishman in a more advanced role; (4) Kaka is no longer the golden boy

at Milan, the mantle having passed to Brazilian striker Alexandre Pato and the tactical approach will be about getting the ball to him as quickly as possible.

Rafa rejects new deal

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez has rejected the terms of a new contract offer with the English Premiership leaders, the Liverpool Echo reported on Friday.

Benitez explained he wanted a new deal to give him more control over football matters instead of having to answer to a club chief execu-

The Echo said that Benitez, stressing money was not the issue, had informed American owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett.

"The owners feel that the manager's decisions need to be subject to the chief executive. But I know that I am subject to results and to our fans and they are the best judges I will ever have," Benitez said. Benitez, 48, had earlier

indicated that "we have agreed the length of contract and we have agreed the salary" but still had to reach agreement on "my role and my responsibilities as manager of the club."

Details of the length of the It is widely assumed that if contract and the salary offered Arsenal are to get back into to the Liverpool manager have Champions League qualifying not been announced. places they will have to rely on Aston Villa, who are away to

The Spaniard, whose current contract runs up until 2010, has been confined to the stands since surgery for a kidney stone and will shortly undergo a third operation. may be easier to eject from the

He is due to enter hospital for surgery on Wednesday but hopes to be back in time for league and FA Cup derbies survival remains as tight as against Everton. ever with only eight points Assistant Sammy Lee takes

charge in his absence.

Kaka bid bemuses Fergie

AFP, Manchester

Sir Alex Ferguson admits he is struggling to make sense of the scale of Manchester City's bid for AC Milan midfielder Kaka.

Manchester United's neighbours have lodged a bid of more than 100 million pounds for the Brazilian playmaker, having paid 32.75 million for Robinho in September.

The offer for Kaka is a signal of City's intent and while Ferguson is still dismissive of the Eastlands clubs' shortterm threat, he is surprised at the level of investment.

He said: "I find it hard to get my head around it to be honest. It's amazing but football is football and sometimes you get shocks and surprises and I think it's surprised everyone.

"I don't think it will affect us. I just can't get my head around the figure, it's got nothing to do with who is buying and who is selling."

Ferguson refused to be drawn into commenting on reports that his old rival Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon has resigned but said: "Goodluck".

Palacios going to Spurs

AFP, Paris

on Friday confirmed there is virtual agreement with Tottenham for the Latics' Honduran midfield star Wilson Palacios in a deal worth around 14 million pounds (18 million dollars).

"The two clubs have virtually agreed a fee. It is how that fee should be paid," Bruce said. "It is up to us as a selling

club to demand what we want in terms of how we should be paid and how we should be structured. We will see what happens."

WHY KAKA MIGHT Elena takes Sydney title



Elena Dementieva of Russia displays her trophy after defeating compatriot Dinara Safina in the Sydney International final on Friday.

out at the start of the final set and re-emerged to take charge, breaking the second seed three times to claim the championship.

all-Russian final at the Sydney

careerWTA title.

ber three Safina.

The world number four

Dementieva, 27, the Beijing

She will head to Melbourne

Olympics gold medallist,

levelled her head-to-head

record at 5-5 with world num-

for the first grand slam tourna-

ment of the year buoyed by a

winning momentum after

ousting top seed Serena Williams

in the semifinals, backed up by

rematch of last year's Beijing

Olympics gold medal show-

down, when Dementieva beat

Auckland WTA tournament

last week, broke Safina in the

seventh game of the opening

set and claimed the set with

courtside pep talk from coach

Zeljko Krajan under the new

WIA rules, came out firing in

the second set, reeling off two

service breaks to level the final.

Dementieva took a time

But Safina, lifted by a

Dementieva, who won the

The Sydney final was a

hervictory over Safina.

Safina, 3-6, 7-5, 6-3.

another service break.

Becks set for home debut

AFP, Rome



David revel in the limelight and he enjoyed plenty of it

ahead of his AC Milan debut last weekend but he has had to take a backseat behind teammate Kaka ahead of this weekend's visit of Fiorentina.

Beckham will make his first appearance for Milan at the San Siro in a crucial clash that the Rossoneri must win if they are to harbour any hopes of claiming the Serie A title this season.

But Brazilian superstar Kaka's on-off transfer to Manchester City has been more than a simple distraction from the Italian giants' prepa-Kaka has been Milan's key

player over the last few seasons but on Thursday night his club revealed they were considering a world record 150 million euro bid from the mega-rich English Premier League team.

The constant rumours cannot have helped Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti's preparations as his team try to cut the nine-point gap to leaders football next season.

and bitter city rivals Inter Milan. And their task won't be

helped by highly-charged opponents who would have moved above Milan into third place in the table had they won at home to lowly Lecce last weekend.

offside trap cost them two goals and a 2-1 defeat and midfielder Riccardo threefronts. Montolivo revealed they are eager to make up for that.

anger and the desire to show that what you saw against Lecce wasn't the real complete team, "he said. Fiorentina," he said. "We're playing against one of

the best teams in the world and the only way we'll earn some points is to play our own game." Another team hoping to take advantage of the turmoil

at Milan is Juventus, one of the most in-form teams in the league who are looking to consolidate second place and even close the four-point gap to Inter. Claudio Ranieri's team face

a stern test of their title credentials when they travel to high-flying Lazio, themselves fighting for a place in the top four and Champions League

Juve qualified for the Coppa Italia quarterfinals in midweek and are also through to the second round in the Champions League, where they will face Chelsea.

Returning midfielder

Cristiano Zanetti, who could be in line for his first league However their abysmal start of the season in the Italian capital, believes his against Lazio. team can challenge on all "Things are going well and

so we shouldn't set any limits "We are going there with on ourselves. We can go all the way in all competitions isamust. because we're a strong and

tant players missing but those who've replaced them have done a fantastic job. The whole squad is competitive and when we get all our players back we'll be even better.'

Saturday AC Milan v Fiorentina, Siena Sunday

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

Another player who could come back into contention is Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon, who played his first game in months in the 3-0 win over Catania on Wednesday.

If Juve want to stay in contention with Inter then they will need to match the results their two Milan rivals achieved

Milan beat them 4-1 at the San Siro while Inter won 3-0 in Rome and for Juve to demonstrate they are serious scudetto challengers a victory

Inter travel to Bergamo to face Atalanta for whom former "We've had some impor- Inter striker Christian Vieri will start on the bench.

Resurgent AS Roma face a trip to struggling Torino with their midweek match winner Julio Baptista claiming fourth spot is in their sights.

Despite a disastrous start to their season, Roma's 2-0 win over Sampdoria moved them to within six points of fourthplaced Napoli in the final Champions League qualification position.

"If we play the way we should then we'll finish fourth. It's in our own hands, we have to win our matches against our direct rivals," said Julio Baptista.

Eto'o warns Barca

AFP, Madrid



Star striker Samuel Eto'o has warned Barcelona cannot afford to get

caught out by complacency as they attempt to push their Spanish title surge into over-Barcelona face Deportivo

La Coruna at Camp Nou on Saturday with a 12-point lead over Real Madrid and Sevilla. "We can't afford to rest on

our laurels because we've thrown away big leads before," said Eto'o. "We can't afford to get tired of winning. Last week, Barcelona were

indebted to Lionel Messi for keeping their season on track. The Argentine, who was pipped by Manchester

United's Cristiano Ronaldo for the World Player of the Year award on Monday, scored a Wigan manager Steve Bruce | hattrick against Atletico Madrid in the Kings Cup and then a last-gasp winner in a 3-2 league win at Osasuna.

The manner in which Barcelona came from behind to win the game in the final ten minutes underlined their never-say-die attitude for manager Pep Guardiola that seemed to have evaporated under former coach Frank Rijkaard.

This spirit is the only thing we can't afford to lose," explained Guardiola. "We all feel part of every game in every competition, that's a

good thing."

Depor are enjoying a great season lying seventh, five points behind Real Madrid, and will hope to get over their midweek Kings Cup exit to Sevilla by becoming only the second team to defeat Barca in the league.

Barcelona have equalled the record points total of 47 for the first half of the season - set by Bernd Schuster's Real Madrid last season - and have one game left to better that mark. Schuster is now gone and

his successor Juande Ramos has started promisingly with Real, winning their last three league matches without conceding a goal. Real host Osasuna at the

Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday. "We have to continue what

we are doing and see if we can win some silverware at the end of the season," declared Ramos.

"We are 12 points behind (Barcelona) and that is a lot but if we win our games the pressure on them increases."

Barcelona v Deportivo La Coruna, Sevilla v Numancia Sunday

Real Madrid v Osasuna, Villarreal v Real Mallorca, Getafe v Racing Santander, Recreativo Huelva v Sporting Gijon, Valladolid v Real Betis, Malaga v Espanyol, Athletic Bilbao v Valencia, Almeria v Atletico Madrid

Dutch winger Arjen Robben has scored in his last two matches and comparisons with Messi have been made in the Spanish media.

"Messi is the best in the world," said Robben. "He is on a different planet."

Sevilla, who reached the quarterfinals of the Kings Cup, are level on points with Real going into Saturday's home game against Numancia and can pull three points clear of the champions with victory.

Elsewhere, Atletico Madrid are desperate to keep Champions League rivals Sevilla on their radar - they are currently five points behind but are low on confidence after four straight defeats, including a painful Cup exit to Barcelona on Wednesday.

Disgruntled Atletico fans flocked out of the Vincente Calderon turnstiles 10 minutes before the end of last weekend's Athletic Bilbao defeat and the players are probably relieved to be away at Almeria on Sunday.

Valencia, a point behind Real and Sevilla, had to play extra-time to overcome Racing Santander in the cup on Wednesday so the legs could be heavy for Sunday's trip to Athletic Bilbao.

"Bilbao are a difficult opponent especially at San Mames with their fans behind them," said Valencia winger Joaquin.

"We have had one day less to prepare and it is going to take it out of us to win there.

KAKA WORTH FOUR F16s

AFP, Rome

Manchester City's 197-million-dollar offer for Brazilian superstar Kaka would be a world record transfer if the deal was to go through.

The fee could also come in useful in other parts of the world. - It could buy almost four F16 fighters which were priced at 55

million dollars each in 2008. - It could cover the GDP of a host of nations. For example, in 2005, the Cook Islands's estimated GDP was 183,200,000 dollars, the Marshall Islands 115,000,000 and Anguilla 108,900,000.

- It could buy as many models of the world's most expensive car as you desire. In 2008, the Bugatti Veyron, at 1,192,057 dollars, was the toppriced on the market.

It could cover the annual operating costs of the USS Nimitz, the world's most expensive aircraft carrier in 2006.

Manucho joins Hull

AFP, London

Hull on Friday agreed to take Manchester United's Angolan striker Manucho on loan until the end of the season.

Barclays Premier League appearance to date for United, who last season loaned him out to Greek side Panathinaikos. Hull still have to secure a

Manucho has made one

workpermit for the 25-year-old. The Tigers are also chasing

former Liverpool right-back Steve Finnan from Espanyol.



French striker Sylvain Wiltord (R) poses with his new jersey during a press conference in Marseille on Thursday after he signed on a six-month loan from Rennes.

Calderon steps down Football

AFP, Madrid Real Madrid president Ramon over the affair on Wednesday Calderon stepped down on Friday following allegations that he rigged voting at the club's last annual general assembly, which approved its financial accounts, Spanish thing, it would leave a void and

media reported. The 57-year-old lawyer, he told a news conference. whose four-year mandate was set to expire in 2010, will be temporarily replaced by the defending Spanish champion's vice president Vicente Boluda Fos until fresh elections are held in June, the Ronaldo and AC Milan's United as the biggest football reports said.

Calderon has been under the Spanish giants. pressure since sports daily stacked a December 7 annual

delegates to get the club's annual accounts for 2008 and its budget for 2009 approved by a slim margin. He fired two club officials

but he rejected calls at that time that he step down, saying he had done nothing wrong. "Quitting is for cowards. Leaving would not fix any-

force the club to call elections," favour with many Real supporters due to his failure to annual ranking compiled by fulfil promises to bring business advisory firm Deloitte. Manchester United's Portuguese winger Cristiano pions overtook Manchester

The crisis over the general big names like David Beckham Marca alleged Tuesday that he assembly comes as Real has and Luis Figo led to a surge in started to close the gap with its sales of replica shirts and other general assembly with fake arch rivals Barcelona since items.

Juande Ramos was made coach in December and are preparing to face Liverpool in the Champions League knockout stages in February and March. While the defending

Spanish champions are in

second place, they still trail the

Catalan side in the Spanish league by 12 points. Real Madrid were the world's largest revenuegenerating club for the third Calderon has fallen out of successive season in the 2006/07 season, according to an

The reigning Spanish cham-Brazilian playmaker Kaka to club by revenue in the 2004/05 season after a policy of signing

