

## Roman to sell Chelsea?

AFP, London

Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich is sounding out wealthy Gulf businessmen about selling Chelsea Football Club, The Sunday Times newspaper reported.

Citing Gulf sources, the weekly broadsheet said Abramovich's representatives had travelled to Saudi Arabia and Dubai to elicit interest in the English Premier League title-chasers.

One unnamed source said: "Abramovich's team have been out in the Middle East sounding out what interest there is in buying the club."

The report said there was no evidence so far of a potential buyer, while the club's chief executive insisted that the Blues were not up for sale.

Since buying the club in 2003, Abramovich's fortune has helped transform Chelsea into a side that has won two Premier League titles and reached the Champions League final.

However, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, who bought Manchester City, has

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## Real battle to a win

AFP, Madrid



Real Madrid came from a goal down to beat Barcelona's lead at the top to 12 points with a hard-fought 3-1 home victory over basement boys Osasuna on Sunday and end a week of boardroom infighting on a high.

In contrast to Barcelona's dazzling 5-0 thrashing of Deportivo La Coruna on Saturday, Real were fortunate to survive two strong penalty claims as they laboured to a win that lifts them into second above Sevilla on goal difference.

"We scored three goals and got three points which is what we wanted," said Real boss Juande Ramos.

"Barcelona are playing magnificent football and that is why they are getting good results.

"We are not playing so well but are getting good results and wins give you confidence and the ability to play better."

Osasuna went ahead through Iranian international

Javad Nekounam's 19th-minute header but gifted Real an equaliser early in the second half with goalkeeper Roberto allowing Sergio Ramos's tame shot to creep in.

Argentine Gonzalo Higuain struck his 12th goal of the season just after the hour mark to turn the game in Real's favour and Arjen Robben added a third they scarcely deserved.

Valencia lost ground on Real and Sevilla after falling to a 3-2 defeat at Athletic Bilbao.

Valencia twice took the lead but Fernando Llorente, recently capped by Spain, scored a 90th-minute penalty to win the game and Valencia are now four points behind second-placed Real.

Atletico Madrid failed to take full advantage of Valencia's slip drawing 1-1 at Almeria who played with ten men from the 53rd minute.

Atletico now sit sixth, three points off the Champions League places.

Osasuna took a 19th minute lead on Sunday when Jaroslav Plasil got down the byline and whipped in a great cross for Nekounam to head

home. It was the first goal Real had conceded since the 2-0 defeat to Barcelona in mid-December.

Ramos thought he had equalised in the 37th minute but the goal was ruled out for offside.

After the break the Spanish international got his goal with his speculative shot fumbled by keeper Roberto who allowed the ball to loop over his body.

Robben then set up Higuain for a simple tap-in and scored himself in the dying seconds.

Real had been let off the hook six minutes from time when Pepe appeared to foul Juanfran in the penalty area.

The referee waved away the appeals and Juanfran, already booked, was sent off for diving.

Villarreal ended a miserable run with a 2-0 triumph over Real Mallorca to rise to fifth, a point behind Valencia.

The club had taken one point from their last 12 before the Mallorca match but a Joan Capdevila strike and a Giuseppe Rossi penalty got them back on the winning trail.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid defender Sergio Ramos (L) celebrates with teammate Pepe after scoring the equalising goal against Osasuna during their Primera Liga clash at Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

## Poldi returns home

INTERNET, undated



Lukas Podolski returns to Cologne in summer after three frustrating years at Bayern Munich where the German striker rarely showed his potential. The clubs announced the deal, reportedly worth 10 million euros (13.28 million dollars), on Monday, putting an end to months of speculation and several weeks of talks between the two sides.

Podolski will sign a contract until 2013 at his home club, but only provided that promoted Cologne stay in the top flight and are not relegated. The western Germans are currently placed 11th.

"I am glad that a decision about my future has been reached and the speculation about me is over," Podolski said on his home page.

Podolski said he had good talks with Cologne coach Christoph Daum and general manager Michael Meier as Cologne aim to build a strong team around the popular forward who is their biggest transfer.

"The club's concept con-

vinced me - we want to achieve something over the next years in Cologne," Podolski told the Cologne website.

Italy's Roma as well as Bundesliga clubs Werder Bremen and SV Hamburg also showed interest in Podolski, but all that he wanted was a homecoming to Cologne where he played from his youth onwards until 2006.

"I am very happy that Lukas returns to us. He followed his heart," said Cologne president Wolfgang Overath, himself a former club icon who won the 1974 World Cup.

Munich general manager Uli Hoenes said that "we

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## Bellamy set for City

AFP, London

Wales striker Craig Bellamy is set to leave West Ham for big spenders Manchester City, the London club confirmed on Monday.

The Hammers have accepted City's bid of around 14 million pounds (15 million euros) for the 29-year-old and Bellamy was expected to rapidly complete a medical to clinch the deal.

The much-travelled Bellamy had demanded a transfer to Tottenham on Friday after rejecting the offer of a new contract, but his club were unwilling to sell to their London rivals.

He was left out of the Hammers squad which defeated Fulham 3-1 on Sunday, with manager Gianfranco Zola stating the player was "not in the right frame of mind".

City have already had three separate bids for Bellamy, turned down, and it was thought he would have preferred to join Spurs.

But with the Hammers refusing to do business with their city rivals, it appears Bellamy has accepted the lure of cash-rich Manchester.

City boss Mark Hughes knows Bellamy well, both with Wales and at Blackburn, and has never had a problem with the player's fiery temperament.

It is not expected there will be any problem with the player's medical, and personal terms should be a formality too, given the amount of money City have at their disposal thanks to their Abu Dhabi ownership.

Bellamy joined West Ham from Liverpool last season having also previously played at Norwich, Coventry, Newcastle, Celtic and Blackburn and has 16 goals in 54 appearances for Wales.

Zola has said he would use the money from selling Bellamy to strengthen a squad that has risen to eighth place in the Premier League.

## City close in on de Jong

AFP, Hamburg

Manchester City are closing in on Hamburg's Dutch international defender Nigel de Jong, whom they are set to land for a fee of between 15 and 20 million euros, the German side's coach Martin Jol said Sunday.

"The two clubs are negotiating and we now must wait to see what transpires from these discussions. It's possible Nigel changes club, and possible he stays where he is," said Jol, saying the club were unconcerned by the transfer talk.

De Jong, 24, missed much of the first half of the Bundesliga campaign with a knee injury but is now back in training.

He has been with Hamburg for three years after switching from Ajax and is under contract until 2010.

## Australian Open SECRETS

INTERNET, undated

Reigning junior champion Bernard Tomic proved himself a rising force at the senior level as a first-round victory on Monday made him the youngest male winner of a match at the Australian Open. The 16-year-old whose controversial father has been in trouble with Tennis Australia for outbursts during matches, showed mature form in his first Grand Slam with a 7-6 (7-5), 1-6, 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (8-6) first-round win over 73rd-ranked Italian Potito Starace.

"It's a dream come true to win a first round in my first Grand Slam," said Tomic. "I'm just thrilled that I could pull off a win today.

"With the crowd behind me, it was an unbelievable experience."

Aged 16 years 89 days, Tomic is 94 days younger than fellow Australian Todd Woodbridge was when he beat American John Letts in the

opening round at Melbourne Park in 1988.

"I was happy today and had no nerves going into the match. I was just happy that I could get off to a good start really."

### JANKOVIC ON FIRE

Jelena Jankovic was forced to step lively on court at the Australian Open Monday as the soles of her new shoes failed to protect her feet from the Melbourne heat. "My feet were burning," said the Serbian top seed, who reached the second round over Austrian Yvonne Meusburger 6-1, 6-3.

"The soles of my shoes got so hot.

"During the changeovers I was putting my feet on ice, trying to cool them down."

The 23-year-old is wearing a new and unknown clothing and shoe brand after splitting with Reebok.

The Chinese firm of ANTA has surely struck gold in its

first high-profile signing by grabbing the world number one.

"I have a new dress on the court. I like the green. It's bright, comfortable to wear and it looks feminine," Jankovic said.

"I also like my shoes," she quickly added.

Jankovic, like Maria Sharapova and the Williams sisters, has a hand in designing her look.

"In the future I will be working with a designing team and I will have my own dresses and a whole range of clothes with my name on it. So it's quite cool. I'm happy, really happy, about it."

But the shoes may have to go back to the drawing board. "I will tell them to put some air conditioning in there," the smiling Serb quipped.

"With technology growing and getting better, I believe in the future we will have these kind of things, too. It would be nice."

## End of the road for Sagnol

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's French international full-back Willy Sagnol will soon be forced to retire due to injury, the club's general manager Uli Hoenes told the German press on Monday.

"It's my belief that he will stop," Hoenes declared to the Munich daily tz.

Hoenes added that he would discuss the defender's future with him this week.

Sagnol, 31, has not competed in a competitive match since Euro 2008, where France were eliminated in the first round.

The former Monaco and Saint-Etienne player picked up an ankle injury last summer. He had hoped to participate in Bayern's winter training camp in Dubai at the start of January, but was forced to remain in Europe.

Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann also expressed doubt over Sagnol's chances of resuming his career.

"He can't run, as he's constantly in pain," he said.

Sagnol missed a large portion of the 2007-08 season with a serious right knee injury sustained in April 2007.

The Frenchman, whose contract expires in June 2010, has won five German championships, four German cups and the 2001 Champions League during his time in Bavaria.

## Premonition for Kaka?

AFP, Sao Paulo

The roof of a church in Sao Paulo that hosted Brazilian football star Kaka's wedding in 2005 collapsed Sunday, killing at least seven people and injuring 57 others, rescue workers told AFP.

Firemen and police were combing through the rubble of the Apostolica Christ Reborn Christian Church in the city's southern suburb of Cambuci to determine casualties.

A spokesman for the fire service run by the state's military police told AFP "we fear there are more bodies" buried under the debris.

Kaka, who is currently being wooed to move to Manchester City from AC Milan, married in the church in December 2005.

According to witnesses quoted by Brazilian television, the roof of the big building collapsed around 7:00 pm (22:00 GMT).

The church, which can hold up to 3,000 people, had scores of worshippers inside for Sunday services at the time. Media put the number at less than 400.

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PHOTO: AFP

Atalanta midfielder Simone Padoin (L) shrugs off Inter Milan counterpart Luis Figo during their Serie A encounter at the Azzurri d'Italia Stadium in Bergamo on Sunday.

## Atalanta stun Inter

AFP, Rome



Juventus failed to fully capitalise after veteran forward Cristiano Doni produced a masterful display to inspire Atalanta to a stunning 3-1 victory over Jose Mourinho's Inter Milan on Sunday.

Former Arsenal goalkeeper Alex Manninger dropped a clanger as second-placed Juve were held to a 1-1 draw at Lazio in the day's late game to cut Inter's lead at the top to three points.

But it was in Bergamo that the real drama happened as Doni scored a brace and set up the third in a magical first 45 minutes in which Atalanta totally dominated the reigning champions.

It was only Inter's second league defeat of the season.

"That was our worst performance of the season, you could compare it with our match in Cyprus in the Champions League (a 3-3 draw at Anorthosis Famagusta)," said Mourinho.

"I can't explain my team's first half hour. When we lose I prefer to speak about how well the other team played but we played so badly in the first half that I prefer to say that we brought this result on

ourselves." The victory, as unexpected as it was one-sided at times, was orchestrated almost entirely by 35-year-old Doni who said: "We played a perfect match, particularly in the first half."

He had the first clear chance of the game, juggling the ball in the box before volleying just wide of the near post.

Then on 18 minutes he turned provider, heading the ball back across goal to club top scorer Sergio Floccari and scored with a crisp, low, left-foot finish from inside the area for his 10th Serie A strike of the season.

On 28 minutes, Atalanta did double their lead, thanks to a huge slice of fortune, as Doni's freekick took a wicked deflection off Zlatan Ibrahimovic's arm in the Inter wall to wrong-foot Julio Cesar.

Atalanta hit a third five minutes later as Doni rose between Cordoba and Burdisso seven yards out to head home Valdes's cross.

Mourinho threw on forwards Victor Obinna, Adriano and Luis Figo but it had little effect.

In Rome, Juventus keeper Manninger made a hash of a deep Cristian Ledesma freekick from out wide on the left, coming for it and then watching it sail over his head into the top corner on 24 minutes.

Lazio's lead lasted only six minutes as former Aston Villa defender Olof Mellberg headed home from a corner.

Brazilian striker Amauri had several good chances for Juve after the break but Lazio's backline held firm as they edged to within four points of the Champions League qualification positions.

"We want to claw back the points and tonight was a good opportunity but it's not easy to earn points against Lazio. We played well," said Juventus coach Claudio Ranieri.

Genoa moved above Napoli into fourth, and the final Champions League position, as Bosko Jankovic and Giuseppe Sculli scored in a 2-0 success at lowly Lecce.

Julio Baptista was the hero again as AS Roma edged closer to the top four with a last gasp 1-0 win at Torino.

The Brazilian forward scoring a stunning bicycle kick two minutes into injury time that leaves Roma eighth, but just five points behind Genoa.

Napoli lost for the fifth time in a row away from home as two Michele Marcolini penalties earned Chievo a 2-1 victory which took them off the bottom.

Australia midfielder Mark Bresciano scored a brace as Palermo boosted their UEFA Cup qualification hopes with a 2-0 win at Sampdoria.



PHOTO: AFP

India star Sania Mirza celebrates winning a point against Marta Domachowska of Poland during their Australian Open match in Melbourne on Monday.