

Trust me: Arshavin

Football

AFF, London

Arsenal's new signing Andrei Arshavin had a message for the Gunners' fans as he set off on his new career at the Emirates Stadium: "Trust in me and Arsenal."

Arshavin, who hopes to help bring silverware to the Arsenal sideboard after some barren years, also said it had been a "dream move" and told Sky television cameras he been a "Gooner," or Arsenal supporter, for some time.

Arsenal confirmed that the Russian playmaker had signed for the Premier League side on a "long-term" contract, believed to be three-and-a-half years.

The London club agreed a deal for the player with his former club, Zenit St Petersburg, just minutes

before Monday's 1700 GMT transfer deadline and had to wait until Tuesday for the move to be ratified by the Premier League.

Arsenal have not yet released information about Arshavin's fee, but it is believed to be around 15 million pounds.

The club have not won a major competition since they triumphed over Manchester United in the FA Cup final in 2005, one year after they went unbeaten to claim the Premier League title.

The 27-year-old is adamant that he has joined one of the best clubs in the world and is sure he can help add silverware to the Gunners trophy cabinet.

The Russian revealed the prospect of playing under manager Arsene Wenger was one of many reasons why he had his heart set on the move. Arshavin had been linked

with a move to Barcelona after he shot to fame following his outstanding performances during Euro 2008, but the Russian said he was happy to join the Gunners, thanks partly due to Wenger.

Arshavin told Arsenal TV: "I moved because I like the Arsenal style, Wenger as a coach and I like some of their players."

The club are thought to have been locked in negotiations with Zenit over the switch since the transfer window re-opened.

"I followed each game and from the moment when I met Arsene Wenger," he added. "He told me every time I talked to him, he said: 'I want you to come to Arsenal.' He had confidence in me."

When asked if he had a message to the Arsenal fans, the 2006 Russian Footballer of the Year answered: "Trust in me and Arsenal."

13 nations, 11 WC bids

Football

AFF, Geneva

England, Australia, the United States and South Korea were among the 13 countries to have formally expressed their interest in hosting the 2018 or 2022 World Cups, FIFA said Tuesday.

The 11 potential bids include joint efforts by Belgium and the Netherlands, who have already linked up to stage Euro 2000, and from 1982 World Cup hosts Spain and Euro 2004 hosts Portugal.

Indonesia, Japan (2002 co-hosts with South Korea), Russia, Mexico, the venue for the 1970 World Cup, and Qatar were the other countries that came forward by Monday's preliminary deadline, world football's governing body said in a statement.

One nation noticeable by its absence from this list is China, who decided to pull out of the race due to the serious problems and low standards of the game in the country,

state media reported.

The 13 potential hosts now have to firm up their interest and register their bids by March 16.

The host nations are due to be appointed by FIFA's executive committee in December 2010, about six months after they are meant to have submitted detailed bids.

The situation over joint bidders is uncertain with FIFA's executive committee set to decide by the March deadline whether to change their rules to permit joint bids.

"It is remarkable that so many high-quality contenders have expressed an initial interest in hosting our flagship competition," said FIFA president Sepp Blatter, calling football a "symbol of hope and integration."

"The current worldwide economic crisis has brought another dimension of uncertainty into the lives of many people around the world."

"Football has an extraordinary power to unite people, as well as an ability to inspire emotions of hope, passion and

joy," Blatter added.

No African countries have come forward to succeed South Africa, which will become the first African country to host football's World Cup next year.

Latin American countries were out of the running since Brazil is due to host the event in 2014.

England, the 1966 hosts and champions, are perceived as being among the favourites although one bid board member, Sir Keith Mills, was last week keen to play down that role.

"I don't think we are the favourites at all now," he claimed.

"There's going to be strong competition from Spain and Portugal and Russia, and we shouldn't underestimate that."

"Australia will be getting the backing of Asia so it is not a foregone conclusion at all."

"But we are in a good starting position and providing we put a good bid together I believe we have a better than even chance of succeeding."

Lampard wins red card appeal

SOCCERNET

Frank Lampard's appeal against the red card he received in Chelsea's 2-0 Premier League defeat at Liverpool has been successful.

Lampard was sent off by referee Mike Riley for his challenge on Xabi Alonso in the 59th minute of Sunday's match.

An independent regulatory commission hearing on Tuesday upheld his claim, resulting in the withdrawal of his three-match suspension.

The third dismissal of Lampard's career was shrouded in controversy, after replays showed the England midfielder made contact with the ball first.

Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari leapt to Lampard's defence, insisting the challenge was legitimate - and the club lodged their appeal with the Football Association on Monday.

Had the claim failed, Lampard would have missed Premier League matches against Hull and Aston Villa and an FA Cup fifth-round tie at Watford.

Meanwhile, goalkeeper Petr Cech has vowed to keep the pressure on Manchester United and Liverpool at the top of the Premier League.

"Eight points in football, especially in the Premier League, means everything can happen," he told the club's official website.

"You can see that from last year. Arsenal were eight points clear and ended up third, so we will keep playing, we will try to keep winning and we will put the pressure on the others."

"We are behind and we need to keep winning so if Man United or Liverpool drop points we can close the gap."

"This is the only way now for us to get back into it. We need to keep winning because we don't have the control in our hands."

Cesc looking for Barca return

AFF, Madrid

Arsenal's Spanish international midfielder Cesc Fabregas wants to return to Barcelona next season where he would have a better chance of playing in the Champions League, sports daily Marca reported Wednesday.

The 21-year-old, who has been in Spain recovering from a serious knee injury that has left him sidelined since December, has met with people linked to the runaway leaders of the Spanish club in recent weeks, it said.

"The message he has sent out to all is that he is crazy for Barcelona to sign him for next season," said the report, with-out-citing sources.

Barcelona does not want to pay more than 20 million euros (26 million dollars) for the player because "no one would understand a huge payout for a player who came through the club's youth team," the newspaper added.

Fabregas, who was injured after a tackle by fellow Spaniard Xabi Alonso during Arsenal's 1-1 draw against Liverpool on December 21, is under contract with the English side until 2014.

He joined Arsenal from the youth ranks of Barcelona in July 2003.

Burnley upset West Brom

AFF, London

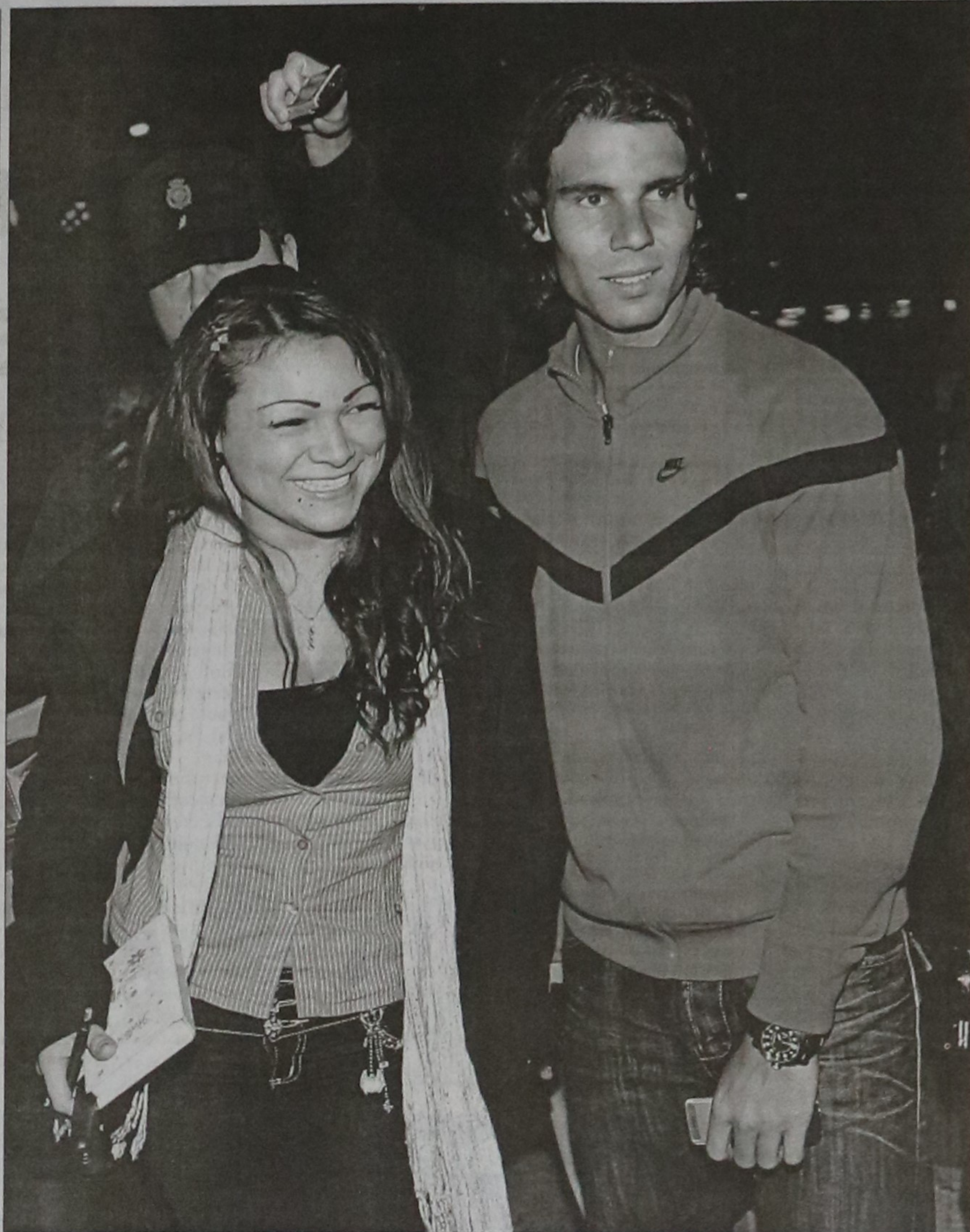
Steven Thompson's two goals for Burnley in a 3-1 FA Cup victory over Premier side West Bromwich Albion on a wintry Tuesday night kept up their giantkilling efforts in the cups.

Wade Elliot's long-range volley on the stroke of half-time started things off and Thompson fired home Burnley's second in the 52nd minute of this fourth round replay.

Under-strength Albion were given hope by Gianni Zuiverloon's sweet 60th-minute strike, but in-form Thompson netted again late on for his fourth goal in two games to seal Burnley's fourth Premier League scalp of the season.

Owen Coyle's impressive Championship outfit, England's second flight, bundled Fulham, Chelsea and Arsenal out of the League Cup and came agonisingly close to overcoming Tottenham in an epic semifinal encounter.

Burnley play the winner of the Arsenal versus Cardiff fixture which was called off because of the impressive snow falls in Britain, also prompting many fixture postponements



World number one Rafael Nadal (R) of Spain poses with a fan upon his arrival from Australia at Palma de Mallorca's airport on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Quaresma vows impact

SOCCERNET



Ricardo Quaresma is determined to put his nightmare spell at Inter.

"I am really glad I have this opportunity to play with such a good club as Chelsea," Quaresma said. Chelsea's defeat at Liverpool on Sunday leaves them five points adrift of Premier League leaders Manchester United, who have a game in hand.

Quaresma is, however, hopeful that he can put Chelsea's faltering quest for silverware back on track.

"Now I aim to play the best that I can to help Chelsea to achieve their goals because all I want is to show my qualities, to show what I am made of and hopefully I am going to help Chelsea achieve their goals," he added.

"Obviously Chelsea is a great club and it has great quality players and I am very proud that I can have the chance to represent such a great club."

Quaresma was the only player to arrive at Stamford Bridge in the winter transfer window while Carlo Cudicini and Sergio Tejera left for Tottenham and Real Mallorca respectively.

He can play on either flank and will compensate for the absence of Joe Cole, who has

tunities to show my qualities at Inter," Quaresma told Chelsea's website.

Quaresma, who has 24 international caps, will now compete with Florent Malouda and Salomon Kalou for places.

"I believe the competition is good and these two are players that I admire," he said.

"My intention is to work hard to gain my place in the team and I believe competing with great players is what makes you a better player."

"I am going to give my best. I am going to prove that I deserve to be in this team and that I am the right player to help Chelsea achieve their goals. Hopefully I will be able to do so."

Quaresma joins countrymen Deco, Jose Bosingwa, Paulo Ferreira, Ricardo Carvalho and Henrique Hilario at Stamford Bridge and he believes that will help him settle into life at the club.

"With all the other Portuguese players, I am sure it is going to be easier for me and I am very glad to be here with them," he added. "I hope to please the supporters as much as I hope to please the team because that is what motivates us."

Barcelona to cash in on Henry

AFF, Madrid

Barcelona striker Thierry Henry could be offloaded at the end of the season, despite his great form, in a bid to boost the Spanish giants' coffers, Spanish sports daily AS claimed Wednesday.

The 31-year-old France international is under contract with Barcelona until 2011 but AS said that Nou Camp chiefs want to cash in by selling the former Arsenal striker at the end of this season.

Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola is said to be a big fan of Henry, however the report claims the club has already identified two possible replacements in Frank Ribery of Bayern Munich or Yoann Gourcuff of Bordeaux.

Henry signed with Barcelona from English Premier League side Arsenal in June 2007 in a deal worth 24 million euros (35 million dollars).

Sky seals EPL TV deal

AFF, London

The English Premier League said Wednesday it had struck a deal with BSkyB for the broadcaster to continue showing the majority of live matches in a deal reportedly worth more than one billion pounds.

"The Premier League has awarded four of the six audiovisual rights packages to BSkyB for seasons 2010-13," a statement on the Premier League's website said.

"We will be proceeding to a second round of bidding for the remaining two packages in due course."

The Times newspaper, which like BSkyB is owned by News Corporation, reported that the broadcaster had paid more than one billion pounds (1.1 billion euros, 1.4 billion dollars) to retain its four existing packages.

They allow BSkyB's Sky channels to show 92 of the 138 live matches available each season.

A second round of bidding on the two remaining packages, which is thought to involve Sky, Setanta and ESPN, could push the overall TV receipts above the 1.7 billion pounds from the deal for the 2007-2010 seasons, the Times said.

Sania blow for India

Tennis

AFF, Perth

India's chances of reaching the next stage of the Federation Cup have been dealt a major blow with the late withdrawal of Sania Mirza.

India's top-ranked female player, having reached a peak of 27 in late 2007, Mirza was expected to spearhead India's challenge in the Asia-Oceania play-offs here this week.

However, she was back in India when her reduced three-woman side started their first tie against New Zealand here on Wednesday.

Mirza's comeback from the wrist problems that dogged her in 2008 gathered momentum when she combined with Mahesh Bhupathi to win the mixed doubles at the Australian Open -- becoming the first Indian woman to win a grand slam title in the process.

She was named in the four-strong Indian Fed Cup squad for the play-offs, but cited a stomach strain for her withdrawal.

"Right now, I will be taking a week's rest because of a tear in my abdominal muscle before beginning preparations for the Thailand and the Dubai Opens," she said at a

media conference in Hyderabad on Tuesday.

"It is the biggest honour to play for your country. But unfortunately this injury came up."

"My body held up pretty well during the grand slam but

with just three players for the event, which features eight nations, split into two groups, in round robin ties including two singles matches and a doubles clash, over three days before the top side from each



SANIA MIRZA

I am not yet ready for a long, demanding schedule."

Mirza's previous trip to Perth, to play for India at the mixed teams Hopman Cup at the start of last year, ended in controversy when she was widely criticised in her homeland after being photographed with her bare feet resting near an Indian flag.

Her absence has left India

division meets in Saturday's final.

The Indian team is world No. 377 Abhita Bhamri, Sanaa Bhamri (478) and Rushmi Chakravathi (509).

The winner of Saturday's final advances to the World Group II play-offs in April.

The other nations in the Asia-Oceania play-offs are Australia, Thailand, Taiwan, Uzbekistan, Indonesia and Korea.

Robinho wants to be best

Football

INTERNET, undated

Robinho is confident he can still achieve his goal of becoming the world's best player after swapping Real Madrid for Manchester City last summer.

Robinho moved to City for a record transfer on deadline day after an acrimonious departure from Madrid, and he has enjoyed a fine start to life at Eastlands with 11 league goals already.

That is already as many as the Brazilian international managed in the most prolific of his three seasons at Madrid, and has left him second behind only Nicolas Anelka in the Premier League

scoring charts.

It has also given Robinho further hope of fulfilling his goal of becoming the best player on the planet, something he feels he would not have become at the Bernabeu.

"I never thought that at Real Madrid I could achieve my objective of being the best player in the world," Robinho said. "Neither could I be the leading goal scorer. So the best thing was to leave."

"I hope to show my best football in England. Some (Brazilian) players have had bad luck in the Premier League because they have not adapted but, in this sense, I've had luck. When I left Santos and signed for Madrid, I was convinced I was going to be the best player in the

world. Now I'm at City and I think the same. I think that in Manchester, I can fulfil my dream of being the best."

City has been linked with a possible big-money swoop for Ronaldo since the takeover by the Abu Dhabi United Group, which bankrolled the record signing of Robinho.

But while he admits he would love to have Ronaldo in his team, Robinho concedes it will be difficult to tempt him across town.

"I think it's quite difficult for him to come to City, because he has made history with United in these last five years," he said. "But if he signed for City he would be welcomed with open arms. It would be a pleasure to play alongside him."