

Becks to return to LA

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

The LA Galaxy expect David Beckham to return in March after AC Milan failed to meet a Friday deadline to make the US club an acceptable offer for the England midfielder.

"Today's deadline imposed by Major League Soccer Commissioner Don Garber regarding a resolution of David Beckham's potential transfer to AC Milan has passed and we did not receive an acceptable offer for the player," Galaxy general manager and head coach Bruce Arena said in a statement.

"As a result, David remains an LA Galaxy player and we look forward to having him back with the club starting March 9."

Beckham is on loan to AC Milan until March 8, and his success there had prompted the club and the player to express a desire to make the move permanent.

Tim Leiweke, chief executive of Galaxy owners AEG, told the Los Angeles Times that no late offer would be considered, because the Galaxy and MLS must move forward with their plans for the upcoming season.

"He will be back here on March 9 and we don't want to entertain any more conversations now," Leiweke told the Times.

"It is a distraction to Bruce Arena, the team and the fans and we move on. That's the last we're going to talk about this."

Reports in Europe on Friday had indicated that despite the deadline, negotiations would go on at least through the weekend.

Leiweke said he wouldn't be surprised if AC Milan responded with an offer over the weekend or next week, but insisted the Galaxy didn't intend to negotiate further.

"They'll come back. Sure they will... That's not fair. We owe it to Bruce and we owe it to the rest of the team. We're a month away from our

season."

Leiweke told the Times that AC Milan had "never been in the ballpark" in terms of offering what Beckham is worth.

Leiweke also addressed speculation that Beckham would try to make up the financial difference out of his own pocket.

"I don't think that's his intent," Leiweke said. "Nor would I encourage him to even think about that."

The former England captain is gearing up for the big Italian derby against rivals Inter Milan this weekend.

The 33-year-old equalled Bobby Moore's England record of 108 caps for an outfield player when he featured against Spain on Wednesday.

And Beckham knows that by playing for Milan, the former club of his international manager Fabio Capello, he should also secure his place in future England squads, perhaps all the way to next year's World Cup in South Africa.

Having drawn level with Moore in Wednesday's 2-0 defeat by Spain, there is now a serious possibility the midfielder could eventually surpass the overall appearances record held by goalkeeper Peter Shilton, who won 125 caps for his country.

"I would like to stay there, I've already said that," Beckham said this week about staying in Milan. "I've nothing against Galaxy, I've had two great years there and there are some great players and great people there. But I'm really enjoying my football at Milan," he said.

But Leiweke told the Times that the Galaxy's focus now would be to "get David excited about the team we're building here and coming back."

Beckham joined the Galaxy amid great fanfare in 2007 on a five-year deal reportedly worth 250 million dollars (183 million euros). However, he does have a provision in his contract that would allow him to leave after the 2009 MLS season.

Another award for Bolt

AFP, Kingston

The honours keep piling up for triple Olympic gold medallist Usain Bolt, who was named Jamaica's Sportsman of the Year for 2008 on Friday.

The announcement by the RJR Sports Foundation came as no surprise. Bolt, who electrified the Beijing Games with victories in the 100m and 200m as well as the 4x100m relay - all in world record times - had already been feted as his country's athlete of the year.

Olympic gold medallists Veronica Campbell-Brown and Melaine Walker shared the Sportsman of the Year award.

Bolt, who opens his season on Saturday at a local meet in the 400m, welcomed his first Sportsman of the Year award.

"It feels good, but most importantly, it's better when you are being recognised by your own country," he said.

West Indies fast bowler Jerome Taylor, who destroyed England with five wickets for 11 runs in nine overs in the first Test match at Sabina Park last week, was runner-up to Bolt.

Walker, who won the Olympic 400m hurdles gold in a games record 52.64, was grateful.

"It's always a great feeling, because you know you are being recognised because of your performance and hard work," said Walker, who was the Jamaica Amateur Athletic Association Female Athlete of the Year.

Shelly-Ann Fraser, the first Jamaican woman to win the 100m title, collected the People's Choice Award, voted on by the Jamaican public.

MU target sweep

AFP, Derby



Nemanja Vidic has no intention of resting on his laurels as Manchester United continue their bid for a trophy clean sweep at Derby County in the FA Cup fifth round on Sunday.

Sir Alex Ferguson's team have already won the Club World Cup this season and are still in the hunt for the other four competitions they entered.

United are two points clear at the top of the Premier League, face Tottenham in the League Cup final on March 1 and are through to the Champions League last 16, where they take on Inter Milan later this month.

A victory against Nigel Clough's Championship outfit this weekend would ease United in the last eight of the FA Cup as well.

The strain of competing for so many different trophies

may prove too much to handle in the end, with the FA Cup fairly low down United's list of priorities.

But Serbia centre-back Vidic, who has been ever-present during United's record-breaking run of 13 successive clean sheets, is determined not to surrender in any competition.

"I am very proud and happy to be part of a team that created the record," he said. "I have been there all the time and it is a nice feeling to know you have not lost a goal for so many games."

"We are delighted to have the new record but we will try to keep going and doing the same things we have done in the past because the most important thing is to win games."

Wayne Rooney remains a doubt for the Derby clash with a hamstring strain but defenders Rio Ferdinand, Patrice Evra and Jonny Evans are all in contention to play.

Ferdinand missed England's defeat against Spain in midweek through illness, but is expected to recover for the visit to Pride

Park.

Evra is now over the foot injury he sustained in the win over Chelsea in January, while Jonny Evans has shaken off an ankle knock.

"Rio was feeling better when he came in on Thursday. He didn't train, but he should be fine," United assistant manager Mike Phelan said.

The only question for Ferguson will be who to rest with a view to the Premier League clash with Fulham next Wednesday.

Edwin van der Sar, who has not conceded a goal since facing Gamba Osaka in the Club World Cup in December, is likely to given the day off along with Portugal winger Cristiano Ronaldo.

Although they lie 35 places below United in the league standings, Derby find themselves in the unique position of being the only team to taste victory over United in 2009.

Derby's League Cup semi-final first leg win is the only blip for United in a 23-game run dating back to a 2-1 defeat at Arsenal on November 8.



Bayer Leverkusen striker Stefan Kiessling (R) is challenged by Hoffenheim defender Andreas Ibertsberger during their Bundesliga encounter at the Rhein Neckar Arena in Sinsheim on Friday.

Bayer rout Hoffenheim

AFP, Berlin



Bundesliga leaders Hoffenheim 4-1 on Friday.

Both goals were executed with ruthless finishing by Helmes as Hoffenheim were humbled at home for the first time at the Rhein-Neckar-Arena which opened in January.

"We knew that we had to put our opponents on the back foot," said Bayer coach Bruno Labbadia.

"We wanted to be the first team to beat Hoffenheim here and I am happy for the team that we achieved that. It was important for us to know we can beat any team in the league."

The league leaders are now in danger of losing their place at the top to Bayern Munich or Hertha Berlin on Saturday. They lead by just a point from Bayern with Bayer Leverkusen now up to fourth and just three points off the leaders.

"We made too many errors, which is not typical of us," said Hoffenheim coach Ralf Rangnick.

"We conceded two goals in the first ten minutes. There

were a few key passages of play for us, above all the goals just before and after half-time.

"It is crucial now to see how the team responds in our next game against Stuttgart."

Parker signs new deal

AFP, London

West Ham midfielder Scott Parker signed a new contract on Friday which ties him to the Premier League club until 2013.

England international Parker had been linked with a move away from Upton Park during the January transfer window, but he joins Dean Ashton, Carlton Cole and Jack Collison in committing his long-term future to the Hammers.

"I am very happy, pleased and excited - especially after all the speculation in the transfer window - that I can now put that to rest and sign a new long-term contract," Parker said.

"In the last few weeks, the way the club is going and the direction that the manager and the board want to go is something I want to follow."

West Ham manager Gianfranco Zola added: "This is great news. Scott is an excellent player and it is good to have him at our service for more years."

Leverkusen took the lead after Hoffenheim's defence allowed Bayer's Brazilian Renato Augusto to slide a cross into Helmes who showed clinical finishing and buried his shot in the back of the net after three minutes.

Hoffenheim were 2-0 down just eight minutes later when a goal-mouth scramble saw Bayer captain Simon Rolfes stab his shot home.

But the home side fought back thanks to a helping hand from Bayer's German goalkeeper Rene Adler.

Adler made a hash of his tackle on Senegal striker Demba Ba, earning himself a yellow card and conceded a penalty simultaneously with half an hour gone.

Midfielder Sejad Salihovic made no mistake with the spot kick.

But Hoffenheim fell further behind just before the half-time whistle when Helmes again received a crisp pass in front of goal and made no mistake in beating former Germany goalkeeper Timo Hildebrand to make it 3-1 at the break.

Leverkusen made sure of the three points when ex-Germany defender Gonzalo Castro lobbed his header over Hildebrand on 48 minutes.

With Bayern Munich playing Hertha Berlin at the capital city's Olympic Stadium on Saturday, the winner of that game will go top of the league.

Hoeness fears meltdown

SOCCERNET

Bayern Munich general manager Uli Hoeness claims clubs throughout Germany "can only pray" that the global financial crisis leaves them unharmed.

The Bavarians are Germany's richest club and would be best placed to deal with a serious financial crisis, but he says prudence remains the order of the day.

Which is why the record German champions are unlikely to go crazy in the transfer market next summer.

"Why should we buy a player for 50 million euros when he could soon be available for 10 with his club going bankrupt?" he asked.

Hoeness fears a wave of bankruptcies due to the prospect of reduced income, particularly from sponsorship and merchandising.

"I would not like to be in the shoes of some of the Bundesliga sides who are looking for a new main sponsor among small companies," he added in the Rheinische Post newspaper.

"We are already noticing that not every new shirt is being sold now. People are holding onto the old ones a bit longer."

"Thank God FC Bayern have only got long-term contracts which run until 2011, 2012 or 2013, and big multinational brands are always going to be investing in us."

"I hope we will have survived the worst in two or three years. We can only pray that the financial system holds firm."

In the meantime, Hoeness promises to do all he can to get Bayern through the looming financial uncertainty unscathed.

"It is no coincidence that we are offering a valuable player like Mark van Bommel only a one-year contract," he said.

"We have got to make sure we can get the most out of everything. At least with the contracts which are expiring we are taking a very good look at the terms."

FIFA bans Mendoza

SOCCERNET

Honduras international Sergio Mendoza has been given a one-year ban for testing positive for doping, FIFA have announced.

The Olympian used a cream on his lips which contained the steroid clostebol before the World Cup qualifying clash last October.

"We are very sorry for Sergio but it is important to admit that he used a substance forbidden by FIFA and he has to be sanctioned," said Giselle Torres, director of the Honduras FA's anti-doping committee.

The ban is retroactive from January 9 but Mendoza has confirmed he will appeal against the length of the suspension.

"I made an involuntary mistake as I didn't realise then that the cream was forbidden," Mendoza said. "I was honest with FIFA. They asked me everything and I told them the truth."

"FIFA gave me the chance to appeal their decision with the aim of reducing the ban to six months. I have 10 days to gather all the information requested and send a report to FIFA in Switzerland."

Of all the familiar faces

INTERNET, undated

Fame is a fickle food, the poet Emily Dickinson once wrote, but that has not stopped its voracious consumption by people throughout the ages. In a quirky look at celebrity, FIFA.com brings you some of the famous footballing faces who are not only well-known for their achievements in the game, but through a remarkable likeness to a star from the world of sport or showbusiness.

Our first candidate is Brazilian Luiz Felipe Scolari, who masterminded the Selecao's triumph at the 2002 World Cup. Given the just-past Chelsea supremacy's striking similarity to Hollywood actor Gene Hackman, could Felipe feasibly pursue a career on the silver screen as well as in the dugout?

In his previous post as Portugal national team coach, Scolari's team were drawn in the same group as Euro 2008 co-hosts Switzerland. In charge of the Swiss was Kobi Kuhn, another man oft-compared with a star of stage and screen - in this case Jack Lemmon. Intriguingly, while Lemmon and Hackman are currently tied on two Oscar wins apiece, it was Kuhn who gained the upper hand at last summer's continental showpiece after his side's 2-0 win.

The Italian coach and former player Giovanni Trapattoni has left an indelible mark on the world and European football scene in recent decades. Nor is Trap averse to a touch of the dramatic, as those who witnessed

his infamous press-conference rant while coach of Bayern Munich will attest. As a result, it should come as no surprise that he too has a spitting image in the film industry, none other than the

late American actor Lloyd Bridges - star of over 150 productions including comic turns in spoofs such as *Hot Shots!* or *Airplane!*

Staying on the theme of comedy acting, there is no

doubt that France coach Raymond Domenech is fond of a quip or two. Yet a quick look at a photo of Domenech during his playing days, complete with big hair and bushy moustache, and Sacha Baron

Cohen's creation Borat immediately springs to mind. In a spooky coincidence, Cohen's portrayal of the blundering Kazakh reporter enjoyed worldwide success in 2006 - the same year Domenech rode

a wave of criticism before guiding France to the Final of the World Cup in Germany.

Germany captain Michael Ballack is another who fails to escape the focus of lookalike hunters, with many a reference made to his likeness to American actor Matt Damon.

Less complimentary, perhaps, are those who have compared Hellboy actor Ron Perlman to Sylvain Armand. Deportivo La Coruna forward Mista, meanwhile, a Liga and UEFA winner during his time at Valencia, must wonder what to make of those who liken him to Hollywood A-lister Sean Penn.

Continuing the cinematic theme, but from the other side of the camera, Monaco coach Ricardo Gomes and former Brazil international Leonardo are surely tired of hearing just how much they resemble film directors Oliver Stone and Roman Polanski respectively. Turning to the world of music next and you have the unlikely duo of Texas rocker Meat Loaf and Blackburn Rovers manager Sam Allardyce. Would Big Sam 'do anything' to keep Rovers in the Premiership one might ask?

Other famous footballing faces have found their mirror images in fellow members of the sporting elite, such as Côte d'Ivoire striker Amara Diane and legendary US sprinter Michael Johnson, Swedish front-runner Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Aussie swimmer Ian Thorpe, or nomadic French-born coach Philippe Troussier and tennis icon Jimmy Connors.



MARRIAGE OF FILM AND SPORT: (Clockwise from top left) Greece's Euro 2004 winning goalkeeper Antonios Nikopolidis could just as easily swap his gloves for a stint at Hollywood, playing star George Clooney's double while Brazilian World Cup winner Luiz Felipe Scolari is hard to tell apart from Academy Award winning actor Gene Hackman. Similarly, Zlatan Ibrahimovic could swap football for swimming and would seamlessly fit in as Ian Thorpe. Germany captain Michael Ballack also fits the mould with Matt Damon his Hollywood twin.

O'Neill angry at Capello

AFP, Birmingham

Aston Villa manager Martin O'Neill plans showdown talks with England coach Fabio Capello after admitting he was surprised that Emile Heskey started Wednesday's friendly against Spain.

Heskey, 31, suffered an Achilles injury during Villa's win at Blackburn last weekend, but was declared fit enough to play by the England medical staff.

The former Liverpool star lasted only 48 minutes of the 2-0 defeat in Seville before coming off and has now suffered a reaction to the problem.

He has been unable to train since returning to Villa and is a major doubt for Sunday's FA Cup fifth round tie at Everton.

O'Neill cannot understand why Heskey was risked in a non-competitive game and will speak to Capello to let him know his feelings.

"Knowing Emile, he would have wanted to have gone down there and played in a bit of discomfort but I was surprised he played considering he wouldn't have been fully fit," O'Neill said.

"The ruling now is that you go down and be assessed at international level by the international medical team."

"If you are fully fit to play, I don't have a problem and you take your chance. If you have been suffering from something a couple of days before, then I think a bit of care should be taken."

"Emile has come back, he didn't train on Friday, the Achilles is particularly sore at this minute. If the game was this minute, he couldn't play."

"I have spoken to the England doctor and voiced some concerns and I will speak to the manager."