

Real land €65m Kaka

Football

THE GUARDIAN

Real Madrid have signed the Brazilian midfielder Kaka from Milan, the La Liga club confirmed today. The 27-year-old international has agreed a six-year contract to become the first player to join Real since Florentino Perez returned to the presidency this month.

Reports said the transfer fee was around €65m (£56m). Perez has vowed to recreate the policy of signing the world's best in his second spell in charge he brought Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane, Luis Figo and David Beckham to the Bernabeu in his first term and snaring the Brazil playmaker is another statement of intent. The official unveiling in Madrid is likely to take place at the end of the month, after the Confederations Cup in South Africa.

Kaka, who is in Brazil on international duty, called Perez's strategy "an interesting sports project." He said: "He's trying to buy other

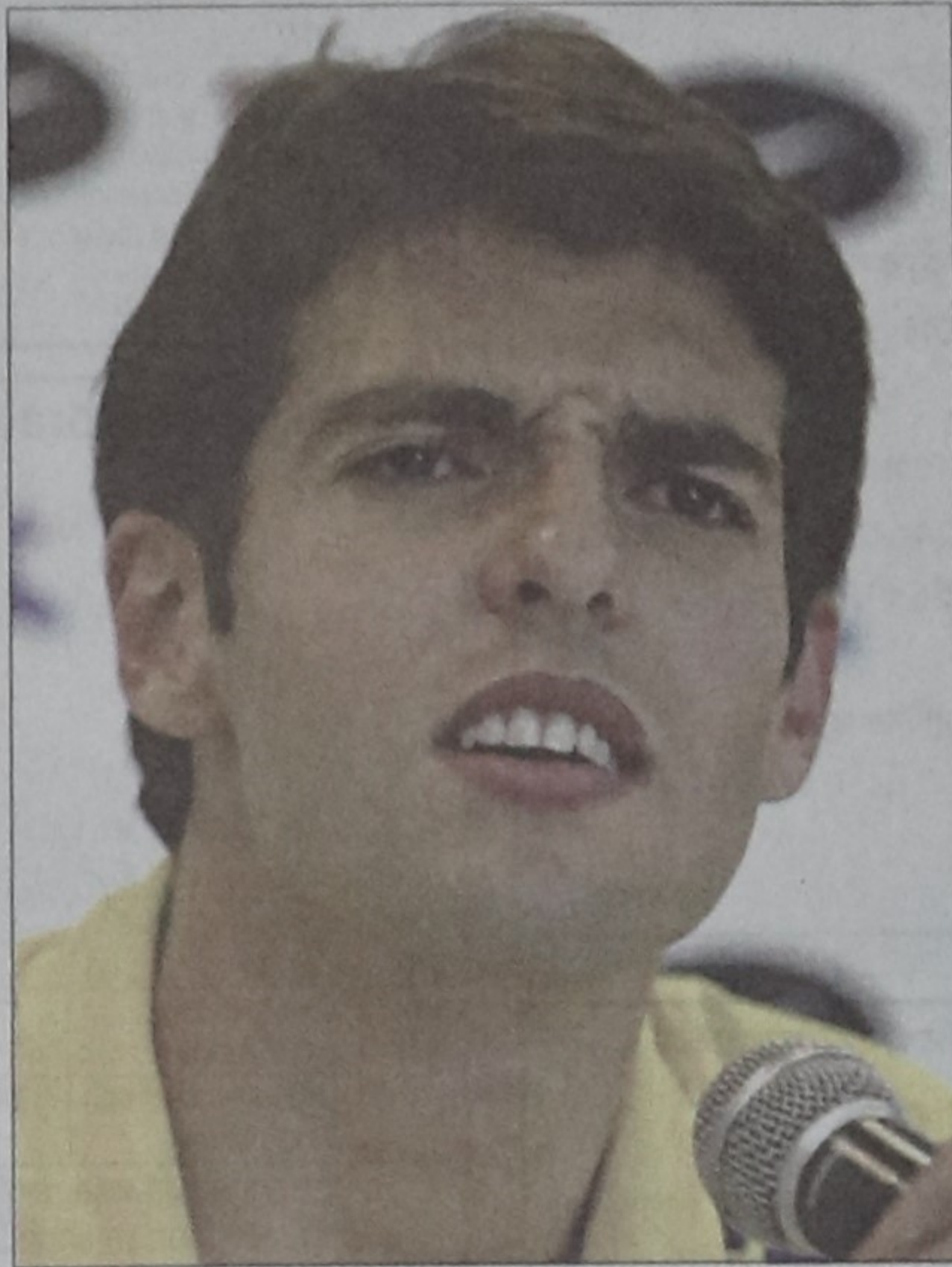
players, and I think he can make a very offensive team. That's behind my decision to go to this team."

Kaka said he talked with his former Milan teammate David Beckham about the transfer, and the England midfielder, who played for Real, said it would be the best step for his career. "I hope to be part of this new project and help to win titles, both European and Spanish," Kaka said.

"Now the soap opera is over," he added after a practice session in the build-up to Wednesday's World Cup qualifier against Paraguay in Recife. "The only leftover details were the medical exams, and I've done them. The negotiations are closed and I have sealed my transfer to Real Madrid."

"Everything I've always done for Milan has been by mutual agreement, from the moment I arrived until my departure today. I'm leaving by the front door. I've won everything that I wanted as a player and this is a new motivation for me."

Milan thanked Kaka for his contribution. "AC Milan



Brazil superstar Kaka addresses a press conference in Recife on Monday where he announced his transfer from AC Milan to Real Madrid.

thanks the man Kaka and the champion Kaka for his decisive contributions to so many victories obtained in the last six years," the Serie A club said.

"His loss on the field, though serious, can be filled. It will, however, be very difficult to fill the void left by Kaka the man."

Perez confirmed that Kaka would be just the first of

several summer signings. His targets also include Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo and Liverpool's Xabi Alonso. "Kaka is one of the players that every team would like to have and Madrid had the chance to get him," Perez said. "We are working on building a good team, an important team, and this has only just begun."

Fans excited about Kaka

INTERNET, Madrid

The fans of Real Madrid are optimistic about the signing of Brazilian megastar Kaka, according to an online poll taken by sports daily Marca on Tuesday. The signing of Kaka from AC Milan for reportedly 67.2 million euros (93.51 million dollars) was announced by both clubs early on Tuesday.

By noon on Tuesday, no less than 37,784 votes had been registered in Marca's poll, which asked its readers "Do you think that Kaka will triumph at Real Madrid?"

76 per cent of readers answered "yes", with only 24 per cent opting for "no."

Kaka has signed a six-year contract with Real worth around nine million euros per season, thus making him one of the world's best paid players.

He is the first signing of new Real president Florentino Perez, who has promised to build a star-studded team capable of challenging the domestic and European domination of historic rivals Barcelona.

Bhuttia faces the music

INTERNET, New Delhi

India soccer captain Bhaichung Bhuttia insists his dancing days are behind him but the club he 'neglected' to appear on a celebrity television show is now telling him to face the music.

Mohun Bagan handed the 32-year-old striker a six-month ban after he missed training to feature in the dance competition, domestic media reported on Tuesday.

Bhuttia and his female partner won the show but he maintains he has no plans to hang up his boots and don dancing shoes full time. "We saw Bhaichung neglecting his duties towards the club for a long time. So we have decided to suspend him for six months," Mohun Bagan club vice president Subrata Mukherjee told reporters.

The suspension would prevent Bhuttia, seen as key to India's hopes of a good showing at the 2011 Asian Cup, from signing for another club.

"He did not take anybody's permission before participating in the dance programme, he is a registered player and cannot act in this manner."

"This is a message only to show that nobody is above the club," Mukherjee was quoted as saying in Kolkata daily The Telegraph.

Local media had suggested Bhuttia had wanted to join Bagan's fierce Kolkata rivals East Bengal but Mukherjee denied he would be released from his contract, which still has a year to run.

"We don't want to talk about releasing Bhaichung," he added. "According to our contract, he will continue as a Bagan player till 2010."

Real to earn \$100m/year

Football

AFP, London

Real Madrid's capture of Brazilian star Kaka could be worth 100 million dollars a season in additional revenues to the Spanish club, according to sports business experts Weber Shandwick Sport.

According to the consultancy, the Brazilian playmaker's international profile will trigger a surge in shirt sales, sponsorship revenue, match ticket sales and boost Real's global fan base, in a manner reminiscent of David Beckham's impact during his 2003-07 spell in the Spanish capital.

The former AC Milan star will also increase Real's capacity to generate income from overseas tours.

Professor Simon Chadwick, who came up with the figures, believes signing Cristiano Ronaldo would add a further 75 million dollars/season to Real's turnover.

Real claim that Beckham earned the club 600 million dollars in sales of shirts and other merchandise alone before his departure for LA Galaxy.

Chadwick said: "Kaka and Ronaldo can be viewed in the same bracket as Beckham when it comes to global commercial impact, if their image is controlled right and Real Madrid improve their results in the UEFA Champions League as a result of their arrival."

"Becks sold a million shirts in his first six months when he was just one of several 'galacticos' at Real, alongside the likes of Zidane, Raul and the Brazilian Ronaldo."

"Even if Real signed one or two of the other stars being mentioned, there would be a real focus on Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo's talents on the pitch, but also their brand off it. That will pay for their transfers several times over, even with a bumper salary package."

"In Ronaldo's case, with the Euro performing well against the pound, that potential transfer is offering far more value for money to Real Madrid than their reported courtship in summer 2007."

Villa close to Real move

AFP, Madrid

Valencia striker David Villa, one of the stars of Spain's victorious Euro 2008 squad, is close to signing for Real Madrid, a Spanish newspaper said Tuesday.

The sports daily Marca said Real are set to pay 37 or 38 million euros for Villa plus bonuses linked to future results.

The top scorer at Euro 2008, Villa, 27, scored 28 goals in the Spanish championship this season.

Valencia is reportedly ready to sell some of its top stars in a bid to ease its financial difficulties.

C'Ron's Asian tour in doubt

AFP, Manchester

Cristiano Ronaldo's involvement in Manchester United's pre-season tour of Asia next month is in doubt following reports the Portugal winger could need a hernia operation.

Ronaldo suffered a groin injury in the latter stages of his country's 2-1 win over Albania in a World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

According to English media reports, the problem could require surgery to correct. An operation would cast doubt on whether Ronaldo would be able to start pre-season training with the rest of the United squad on schedule and, as a consequence, reduce the chances of him travelling to Asia.

United are due in Malaysia for the opening match of their four-country tour on July 18. They are also due to play in Indonesia, South Korea and China.

Mascherano would jump at Barca chance

INTERNET, undated

Javier Mascherano's agent has made it clear that the Liverpool midfielder would jump at the chance to join Barcelona.

Mascherano has been linked with a move to the European champions, and agent Walter Tamer claims his client would be very keen.

"If a club like Barcelona want to bring you into their ranks after having completed such a brilliant season and having won everything, obviously as a player, you are going to say, 'Yes, I want to play there,'" he told RAC-1 programme 'Tu Dirás'.

"It is an honour for Javier that a club like Barca pay such close attention to him, especially after the incredible season they had. I believe that a transfer would be feasible. If Barca really want him, he will sign for them."

"He would have a very easy job at Barca. Sometimes we talk and joke that the only thing he has to do is run, rob the ball, and pass it on to all the superstars in front of him."

But Tamer does admit that the move could be made more difficult if Liverpool agree to sell Xabi Alonso to Real Madrid.

"What if Xabi Alonso also leaves? Surely, Rafael Benitez would not want to have both his central midfielders go. It will be difficult, although Xabi's future does not depend on Mascherano and vice-versa."

"The transaction would certainly happen, but the first to leave will have more options."

Real undecided about Ruud

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid have stated that they remain undecided over the future of Ruud van Nistelrooy, who has been linked with a move to Tottenham.

The striker is currently fighting to be fit for the start of the season after undergoing knee surgery in November but that has not stopped rumours surfacing regarding where he will play next season.

The Dutchman appears to have been pushed down the pecking order at the Bernabeu following the arrival of Kaka, while Real have been continuously linked with moves for David Villa and Cristiano Ronaldo this summer.

Real are said to be ready to let van Nistelrooy leave for 1.25million Euros despite the former Manchester United frontman voicing his desire to stay and fight for his place in the Spanish capital.

The news is likely to alert Spurs and Panathinaikos, who have been linked with a move for the 32-year-old.

"We are still not decided over the situation of some players like van Nistelrooy," a Real Madrid source told skysports. "At the moment, we have other priorities and they will wait until next week."

New Real manager Manuel Pellegrini is believed to have the deciding say over whether van Nistelrooy will stay at the club.

Barca aiming to keep Eto'o

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said Monday he hoped to hold on to Samuel Eto'o despite interest in the Cameroonian striker from some of Europe's top clubs.

"We're trying to find a way in which he can stay," he said after talks between the player's agent, Josep Maria Mesalles, and Barca's director of football Txiki Begiristain.

That was the message from Mesalles too.

"The player is not going to be looking to go. He likes it here and there is no better place to live than Barcelona," he said, but added "we're not ruling anything out."

Eto'o, the top scorer for Barcelona in the league this season with 30 goals, is under contract with the Catalan side until 2010.

But the 28-year-old has reportedly sparked interest from big-spending English Premier League club Manchester City, French side Lyon and Italy's Inter Milan.

Spanish media have tipped Valencia's David Villa, Atletico Milan's Diego Forlan and Inter Milan's Zlatan Ibrahimovic as possible replacements for Eto'o.

Pressure on Saudis

AFP, Seoul



South Korea might have a stress-free conclusion to Asian World Cup qualifying having already booked their ticket to South Africa, but for Saudi Arabia the pressure is on.

Fresh off their 2-0 away win over the United Arab Emirates on Saturday, South Korea host the Saudis on Wednesday and then Iran on June 17.

Despite the temptation to relax, coach Huh Jung-moo said he was determined to close out the qualification rounds undefeated. His charges so far have four wins and two draws.

"I told my players the party was over Sunday," Huh said. "We still have work left to do."

Though South Korea has nothing riding on the outcome of Wednesday's game here, the result could have a

significant impact on which country snatches the last automatic Asian berth in South Africa.

North Korea is currently second in the group on 11 points, one ahead of Saudi Arabia but having played a game more.

If South Korea defeats Saudi Arabia, then North Korea only needs a draw against them in Riyadh on June 17 to qualify.

Cho Chung-yun, chairman of the Korea Football Association, the South's football governing body, admitted to reporters that North Korean officials have "asked us for help" against Saudi Arabia.

The two Koreans, which technically remain at war because the 1950-53 Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, have never played at the same World Cup tournament.

Huh said over the weekend he would like to see the North qualify, but on Monday insisted he was not considering their request for assistance.

England on the verge

AFP, Paris



England can practically guarantee their place at the 2010 World Cup if they beat minnows Andorra at home on Wednesday in the last round of this season's European qualifying matches.

England's 4-0 victory in Kazakhstan on Saturday - their sixth win in six games - allowed them to open up a seven-point lead over second-placed Croatia in group six with just four matches remaining.

Victory against Andorra, ranked 196th in the world, would therefore put them 10 points clear and mean that a win at home to Croatia in September would be enough to secure their place in South Africa.

Croatia were the team that denied England a place at the 2008 European Championships, but captain John Terry says his side cannot afford to look too far ahead.

"We are playing well and are on the way to where we want to be," he said.

"But there's no point being at the top now and in a year's time not being where we want to be. We know there are still improvements to be made."

Croatia stunned England to reach last summer's European showpiece in Austria and Switzerland, where they reached the quarter-finals, but on Saturday they drew 2-2 at home to Ukraine, who can move level with the Croats if they defeat Kazakhstan in Kiev.

If England's path to the World Cup appears straightforward, the same cannot be said for 1998 champions France.

They currently trail Serbia by five points in group seven and the Serbs can extend their lead to eight points with victory in the Faroe Islands on Wednesday.

With only the top-finishing team in each group guaranteed to qualify, Radomir Antic's side are in pole position to reach their first World Cup since splitting from Montenegro in 2006.

"I have enormous respect for the French," said former Barcelona and Real Madrid

coach Antic, who became Serbia coach in August last year.

"I only have good things to say about the team. But we've taken the dominant role in our group over the last few months, and I believe in my players."

With Germany having taken command of group six, Russia and Finland are being forced to do battle for second place and a possible berth in the play-offs for the eight best group runners-up.

The sides meet in Helsinki on Wednesday, with Finland knowing that victory will take them above Guus Hiddink's men into second place.

Sweden lost 1-0 at home to near-neighbours Denmark on Saturday, leaving them 10 points behind their Scandinavian rivals, who lead group one.

"Realistically, we're setting our sights on second place and qualifying," Sweden coach Lars Lagerback said ahead of their home game with Malta.

The Netherlands became the first European team to qualify for the World Cup when they beat Iceland 2-1 in Reykjavik last weekend.

Bert van Marwijk's team host group nine's bottom side Norway, while Macedonia and Iceland will compete to go level on points with second-placed Scotland.

FIXTURES

(1700GMT unless otherwise stated)
Wednesday
England v Andorra (1915GMT), Faroe Islands v Serbia (1815GMT), Finland v Russia (1730GMT), Macedonia v Iceland (1545GMT), Netherlands v Norway (1845GMT), Sweden v Malta, Ukraine v Kazakhstan



England striker Wayne Rooney (L) controls the ball during a training session at London Colney on Tuesday. England will play against Andorra tonight.