

Owen set for MU move

AFP, London

Premier League champions Manchester United are set to sign out-of-favour England striker Michael Owen on a surprise free transfer deal, according to reports in the British press here Friday.

The move could be tied up later in the day if Owen passes a medical.

Owen's contract with Newcastle, relegated from the English top-flight last season, lapsed on July 1.

It seemed the only clubs interested in signing the 29-year-old former Liverpool and Real Madrid striker were Stoke and Hull - both Premier League sides but teams for whom staying up was an achievement in itself.

However, they now appear to have been joined by United, who have seen forwards Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez both leave Old Trafford since the end of last season.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson is reportedly planning to sign Owen, whose time at Newcastle was blighted by a succession of injury problems, on a pay-as-you-play deal.

Owen's weekly wage at Newcastle, for whom he scored 10 goals last season, was believed to be around 120,000 pounds (197,000 dollars) but reports said he would take a substantial payout to sign for a leading Premier League club.

The forward, who has scored 40 goals in 89 England appearances, has yet to persuade England coach Fabio Capello he has a future at international level.

But Owen's career could be rejuvenated by playing alongside the likes of England striker Wayne Rooney at Old Trafford.

United have yet to make a public comment about the proposed deal.

Chelsea reject Terry bid

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea confirmed on Friday that they have rejected an offer from Manchester City to sign central defender John Terry. City were also knocked back in an effort to sign the England and Chelsea captain last summer. The latest setback completes a miserable week in which Barcelona forward Samuel Eto'o turned down a move to Eastlands.

"We can confirm we have completely rejected an offer from Manchester City for John Terry," Chelsea said in a statement on their website.

"It was made clear to City, for a second time following an approach last season, that we would not entertain any conversation on the subject.

"At the time John also reiterated his total commitment to Chelsea.

"We would like to make it clear, and will not do so again, that John is not for sale."

City release former stars

AFP, London

German World Cup finalist Dietmar Hamann and former England internationals Darius Vassell and Danny Mills were among four players released by big spending Manchester City on Wednesday.

The trio were joined by former Rangers and Everton defender Michael Ball as club manager Mark Hughes reduced his squad ahead of potentially more big name signings to join those of Roque Santa Cruz and Gareth Barry.

Hamann, who was a member of the German side that lost to Brazil in the 2002 World Cup final and the Liverpool side that won the epic 2005 Champions League against AC Milan, failed to play in the last months of the season because of a toe injury.

Both Vassell and Mills also played in the 2002 World Cup finals, with the former going on to win 22 caps, scoring six goals, but the 29-year-old striker has struggled for his place and has been strongly linked with a move to Turkey with Ankaragucu his favoured destination.

Mills, 32 and capped 19 times, was another of the players to leave cash-strapped Leeds United with City being his destination in 2004 - however he rarely made a first team place his own and found himself loaned out to Hull City, Charlton and Derby.

It was at Derby - during their disastrous one season stay in the Premier League - where he picked up a serious knee injury in January 2008 and he has not played since.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid's new signing Spanish defender Raul Albiol (R) holds his new jersey next to club's honorary president Alfredo di Stefano during his presentation at the Santiago Bernabeu on Thursday.

Bayern hold firm

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's star midfielder Franck Ribery admitted Friday he wants to leave the Bundesliga giants for Real Madrid while the Germans are insisting he will stay.

"I have decided: I want to leave," the 26-year-old midfielder told L'Equipe with the new Bundesliga season set to begin on August 7.

"It will be Real or nothing at all."

But Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has always insisted Ribery will stay.

Dutch coach Louis van Gaal took his first session on Wednesday since joining from AZ Alkmaar, but Ribery

trained for only 45 minutes on Thursday morning before he quit with blisters and he completely missed the afternoon session.

"We are completely relaxed about the issue," said the Bayern boss.

"I have heard the statement from Franck: Either Real or nothing."

"And our clear answer is: nothing," Franck stays.

And Bayern are standing their ground with Manchester United, Chelsea and Barcelona all also reported to be interested in signing the Frenchman.

"There is the clear statement that we want to keep Franck in Munich," said team manager Uli Hoeness, who then joked about the situation.

"I wonder if Real's negotiator Pedro Jimenez knows the game Monopoly."

"It is a game we play here in Germany with children, Bayern played it two years ago and bought Park Lane, we have built four hotels on it."

"We will only let it go if we are broke or in an emergency."

"It is simply the case it is too valuable to us and expensive."

"Only if someone wanted to make a completely crazy bid would we consider it."

Madrid have already splashed out well over a hundred million euros this summer for superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and Kaka as president Florentino Perez looks to recreate the Galacticos of 2004 when Zinedine Zidane, Michael Owen and David Beckham all played for Real.

Real seek new adidas deal

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have asked sponsor adidas to double to 60 million euros the amount it pays the club annually, in view of their signing of a host of new stars, a Spanish newspaper said Friday.

Real's new president Florentino Perez is seeking the renegotiation of its contract with the German sporting goods manufacturer, which runs until 2012, El Pais said, quoting sources close to the club and to the sponsor.

It said a refusal by adidas, which produces and sells the club's shirts, could push Real to take its business to the company's US rival Nike.

Besides adidas, Real has several other sponsors, including Coca-Cola, Audi, Bwin and Telefonica, which altogether pay them some 130 millions euros a year, around one third of the club's revenues of 400 million.

In the past month, Real has shelled out more than 200 million euros for top stars Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Raul Albiol and Karim Benzema.

Perez wants to up the club's turnover to 500 million, partly so he can cover the huge salaries of 10 million a year promised to Ronaldo and Kaka and to pay for more signings, El Pais said.

"We are the best club in the world," Perez told adidas CEO Herbert Hainer in a telephone conversation seeking a renegotiation of their contract, according to El Pais.

Di Matteo to stay true

AFP, London

New West Bromwich Albion boss Roberto di Matteo promised Baggies fans on Thursday he would stay true to the club's traditions of attacking football.

The 39-year-old former Italy midfielder, who made his name as a manager in the English lower leagues with MK Dons, has arrived at the Hawthorns following the club's relegation from the English Premier League last season.

Di Matteo, who has replaced Tony Mowbray after he left to take over the reins at Scottish giants Celtic, said: "My philosophy is to play successful and winning football."

"We have our view on how we would like to achieve that success. I think that will turn out to be a positive style of football and we'll try to apply that to the Baggies this season."

Di Matteo has brought Eddie Newton and Ade Mafe from MK Dons as assistant head coach and head of sports science respectively.

He added: "All three of us are very hard-working people - and that's what you're going to get from us. There is a very good team here and we will try our best to go back up again."

"I'm very grateful to MK Dons and the chairman for letting me go to take up this opportunity. The chairman had to be brave last season to give me a chance and it worked out well for both of us."

Real unveil Albiol

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid director general Jorge Valdano has defended his side's spending spree on new players like Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo, saying the cash-rich club can afford it.

"Real Madrid is the richest club in the world. It generates a lot of money and this is why it recruits first rate players," he said after unveiling new defender Raul Albiol, who joined Real from Valencia for a reported fee of 15 million euros late Thursday.

Valdano made the comment when asked by reporters about the criticism by UEFA president Michel Platini over the more than 200

million euros which Real has shelled out for new talent.

Real paid 93 million euros to recruit Ronaldo, the 2008 FIFA World Footballer of the Year, from Manchester United and 65 million euros to secure Kaka, the FIFA World Footballer of the Year, from AC Milan.

In an interview published Thursday in French sports daily L'Equipe, Platini said the huge sums of money spent by clubs like Real in the transfer market was "not normal".

Last month he said UEFA was planning action to put an end to football's excesses.

"These transfers are a serious challenge to the idea of fairplay and the concept of financial balance in our competitions," he said, adding the

new set of rules being developed was UEFA's "top priority today".

Real is the world's largest revenue-generating club in the world, ahead of Manchester United and Barcelona, according to an annual ranking compiled by business advisory firm Deloitte.

The club boosted revenues from t-shirts and other souvenirs after it began signing top players like France's Zinedine Zidane and England's David Beckham in 2000.

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 consultancy Weber Shandwick Sport.

Ronaldo winning again

Football

AP, Sao Paulo

Four months into his remarkable return to soccer, Ronaldo is getting used to winning titles again.

The veteran striker helped Corinthians clinch the Brazilian Cup on Wednesday, lifting his second trophy in a row since recovering from the third serious knee injury of his career.

Ronaldo already won the traditional Sao Paulo state title with Corinthians in May, and Wednesday's win caps off the striker's successful comeback to competitive soccer.

"I have to be thankful. My return to football has really been fantastic," Ronaldo said. "I couldn't imagine things would happen like this."

Although he is yet to reach the form that made him a three-time world player of the year, Ronaldo has been key for Corinthians since debuting with the popular Brazilian

club in March.

He has scored 11 goals, including decisive ones in the final of the Sao Paulo state championship and in the first leg of the Brazilian Cup final two weeks ago in Sao Paulo, when Corinthians won 2-0. Ronaldo didn't score Wednesday in the 2-2 draw in Porto Alegre, but set up the team's second goal.

"It was a great final," Ronaldo said. "This group showed a lot of strength, it deserved this title."

The victory adds another trophy to Ronaldo's long list of triumphs, which include the 1994 and 2002 World Cups with Brazil. He also was successful at club level in Europe, winning trophies with PSV Eindhoven, Barcelona, Inter Milan and Real Madrid.

Wednesday's victory also gave Corinthians a berth in next year's Copa Libertadores, Latin America's most important club competition and the team's main objective for next year. It could end up helping persuade Ronaldo to extend

his contract with the club past the end of 2009.

"Let's see how it goes, but the tendency is to stay, I think we are headed that way," Ronaldo said.

Corinthians president Andre Sanches said it's likely the 32-year-old star will remain at the club for 2010.

"Everything is going as planned," Sanches said. "So automatically, we are halfway through to adding another year to his contract. Ronaldo is happy to be playing with Corinthians and we are happy to have him here."

Ronaldo signed with Corinthians in December 2008 despite doubts he would never recover from the knee injury he sustained with AC Milan in February of that year.

Ronaldo and Corinthians will return their focus to the Brazilian league, in which the team is sixth in the 20-team standings with 11 points from eight matches. Corinthians is trying to win its fifth Brazilian league title.

Villa after Borowski

Football

INTERNET, undated

Aston Villa have been given the green light to pursue their interest in Germany midfielder Tim Borowski but face competition from his former club Werder Bremen.

Villa manager Martin O'Neill is believed to be considering a £5m move for Bayern Munich's powerful 29-year old, and Allianz Arena insiders insist that would be more than enough to prise him away.

New Bayern coach Louis Van Gaal is keen to stamp his

mark on the Bundesliga side, after officially taking over earlier this week, and is prepared to sacrifice Borowski to add to his transfer budget.

He may not be short of takers after it emerged that Werder Bremen have also registered an interest in the versatile 6ft 4in German international, who has been used in an attacking midfield role by his country but can also fill the anchor position or even operate on the flanks.

Bremen coach Thomas Schaaf is coming under growing pressure after a 10th place finish last season - their worst for over a decade - and has

made it clear to Borowski that he can be a pivotal figure in revitalising their fortunes.

There is bound to be an emotional pull for Borowski after he graduated from the club's Academy and spent eight years in their first team before joining Bayern on a Bosman free last summer and scoring five times in 35 appearances in his first season at the Allianz.

But Villa need midfield reinforcements as well, after reluctantly selling Gareth Barry to Manchester City, and are unlikely to succeed in trying to lure Tom Huddlestone away from Tottenham.

Gomez has no fear

Football

INTERNET, Munich

Germany striker Mario Gomez has no fear for his place in the Bayern Munich attacking lineup as he seeks a second Bundesliga title following a 2007 triumph with VfB Stuttgart.

The 30-million-euro (42 million dollars) summer signing joins first-choice strikers Miroslav Klose and Luca Toni at the club and will also face the challenge of Croatia striker Ivica Olic, who joins from SV Hamburg.

"I don't know how the striking duo will look. That's the decision of the coach," Gomez said Thursday.

"I am simply looking forward to Bayern Munich and the games in which I can play."

Gomez, 23, whose 24 goals last season made him the best German goalscorer in the Bundesliga, said he would be out to prove himself every day in training after joining Munich for a Bundesliga-record fee.

It's not known how new Bayern coach Louis van Gaal aims to fit in his strike force, and there have been reports that the arrival of Gomez could eventually herald the departure of Italy striker Toni.

For Germany ahead of the 2010 World Cup, the ideal

pairing, if van Gaal plays uses two forwards, would be Klose and Gomez.

However, Gomez may be wary of the fate of Germany striker Lukas Podolski who spent a good deal of his time on the substitutes' bench after arriving at the club following the 2006 World Cup on a four-year contract. Podolski has now returned to Cologne.

Gomez said he was hungry for more titles, with the target for the new season the domestic league and cup titles, with the Champions League "in the next few years."

"I am a player who wants

titles. That gives you the most fun as a footballer, and a few things are possible next season," he said.

Gomez is one of six newcomers at the club including Olic, Ukrainian midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk from Zenit St Petersburg, Croatian midfielder Danijel Pranjić from Heerenveen, Dutch defender Edson Braafheid from FC Twente and German midfielder Alexander Baumjohann from Borussia Moenchengladbach.

German defender Andreas Goerlitz meanwhile returns from a loan spell at Karlsruhe.



MARIO GOMEZ



PHOTO: AFP

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (L) kisses the Cup of Brazil as he poses with Corinthians striker Ronaldo (R) during a meeting at Alvorada Palace in Brasilia on Thursday.

Laporta upset at Eto'o saga

Football

SOCCERNET

Barcelona president Joan Laporta has admitted that he feels "saddened" by the ongoing saga over future of striker Samuel Eto'o.

Manchester City are waiting on a response to their £25m offer for the Cameroon international and the situation became further confused this week when Barcelona came out to insist they wanted him to stay at the Nou Camp, but that his wage demands were astronomical.

However, the player's agent called a press conference to state such claims were "absolutely false" and that representatives of the Catalan

club had twice told him that Eto'o was surplus to requirements.

Laporta has now criticised agent Josep Maria Mesalles for going public over the issue, and admits it is all getting very ugly.

"His representative and Samuel have said that he wants to continue and the club have offered him a contract renewal with the same conditions that he had, which we believe are very good," Laporta said on Cadena Cope.

"I think that what his representative is doing is not helping Samuel. It's a mistake to take the debate in the media. It's not doing the player any favours."

"Personally this matter has left me a little disappointed, it

saddens me because I hold Eto'o in high esteem."

"I would like, in the same way as I've said how up until now he has given a lot to Barca, that he (Eto'o) reflects on what Barca have given him."

"I will do everything possible to find the best solution for the club and for Eto'o. It would be best for both parties."

Laporta has also insisted Barca would not be held to ransom by Valencia over a possible move for David Villa.

"Regarding Villa, it would not be prudent for me to reveal how the negotiations are going," Laporta said. "We would be delighted that he came, but it will depend on negotiations and the price. We cannot do things that will break the model that the club has."