



Japanese star Shunsuke Nakamura undergoes a medical at a clinic in Barcelona on Saturday. The 31-year-old ex-Celtic playmaker signed for Espanyol last month on a contract worth 1.7 million dollars a year.

Real in for Agostino

SOCERNET

Serie A side Udinese have confirmed that Real Madrid are interested in signing Italian midfielder Gaetano D'Agostino.

The news will provide a boost to Liverpool manager Rafa Benitez, who has been trying to fend off the Spanish Primera Liga side's interest in Xabi Alonso.

Madrid admitted last week that Liverpool's asking price for the Spanish midfielder was too high and now appear to have switched their attention to 27-year-old Italian international D'Agostino.

Udinese president Giampaolo Pozzo said: "I confirm that they (Real) are interested."

"My son was set to meet them yesterday but he was unable to do so we postponed everything until next week."

"The buy-out clause of the player remains the same, £25m, but there's always room to reason. There are players they have that could interest us. It's an open negotiation."

D'Agostino has been a target of Juventus this summer but Udinese's asking price of £17m was not met by the Turin giants.

D'Agostino, who is under contract with the Friuli outfit until June 2014, would love to play at the Bernabeu stadium.

"It's the dream of any player to play at Real Madrid," said D'Agostino to Onda Cero. "They have a spectacular team."

"That is why I'm nervous and excited. I thank Real for their interest, I am happy, but there's nothing official just yet."

Juve hope to rope in Melo

SOCERNET

Juventus hope to complete Felipe Melo's £21m transfer from Fiorentina next week.

The Turin giants are keen to sign the Brazilian midfielder, who is also a target of Arsenal.

"I hope he can come to Pinzolo (Juventus' pre-season training camp)," said Juventus president Giovanni Cobolli Gigli.

"That would mean that the negotiations would be done fast. Our relations with Fiorentina are very good. I am optimistic."

"But Melo's transfer will only be completed once the player signs the contract and I hope that will happen as soon as possible."

The 25-year-old Melo arrived to Florence from Spanish side Almeria last summer in a £7m transfer.

He is contracted to Fiorentina until 2013.

'Two-faced Mourinho'

Football

AFP, London

England defender Glen Johnson claimed Sunday that a breakdown in trust with former Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho lead to his departure from the Premier League club.

Johnson, who this week completed a £17 million pound (25 million dollars) move from Portsmouth to Liverpool, accused Mourinho of breaking promises when they were both at Stamford Bridge.

And Johnson said he knew he could not continue with the club when he did not feature against Barcelona in the Champions League.

"I remember the lowest point was when Chelsea were set to play Barcelona in the Champions League," said Johnson, who later moved to Portsmouth for 4 million pounds.

"We had a couple of Premier League games to play before we played Barca, and Mourinho picked me for one of those games and told me in front of five witnesses that if I played well I would keep the shirt."

"I immediately told my agent that it didn't matter how well I played I would be dropped - because Mourinho wouldn't want me anywhere near the team for the Barcelona game."

"Sure enough, I was voted man of the match and I was dropped from the squad."

Johnson has still not figured out why he did not figure in the plans of the Portuguese coach who is now with Inter Milan.

"You would have to ask Jose Mourinho what his reasons were, but I know it was because he didn't want to see me play well again and be forced to pick me for the Barcelona game."

"That was the day I knew I had to leave Chelsea. Managers have to stick to their word. You have to be able to trust them."

Zlatan off the market

Football

SOCERNET

Inter Milan are no longer willing to sell Zlatan Ibrahimovic and have taken Serie A's top scorer off the market, according to club president Massimo Moratti.

Inter had stated they were willing to offload the Swedish international, who was linked to Barcelona, Real Madrid and Manchester United, but no club was willing to meet an asking price of about £70m.

Moratti says that means the 27-year-old will be staying at the San Siro. The Nerazzurri chief said: "Zlatan Ibrahimovic is absolutely off the market."

Ibrahimovic, who had intimated he wanted a new challenge, is now "happy" to remain at Inter.

The former Juventus striker said: "What happens happens. I am happy to be here, I am as pleased as the first day when I came to Inter."

Meanwhile, Moratti added that Chelsea centre-back Ricardo Carvalho and Blues midfielder Deco were unlikely to join Inter after talks broke down over the price tag.

"These targets are more and more difficult to obtain because they are players that are very

useful only at the right cost," he said when asked about the pair. "Otherwise, they risk being bad buys."

Moratti also said there will be no excuse for failure in next season's Champions League after coach Jose Mourinho played down Inter's

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ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC

Webber's maiden win

AFP, Nurburgring

Mark Webber secured his

maiden Formula One victory and Australia's first since 1981 when he led teammate Sebastian Vettel home in a triumph one-two for the Red Bull team in Sunday's German Grand Prix.

Webber, in his 130th F1 race after eight years in the sport, started from his first pole position and overcame a drive-through penalty for a first lap collision on his way to a spectacular win at the circuit in the Eifel mountains.

The 32-year-old driver from Queensland, in New South Wales, came home 9.3 seconds clear of Vettel as he raced to a victory that threw the fight for the world championship wide open.

The two Red Bulls finished first and second ahead of Ferrari's Felipe Massa of Brazil, who

grabbed his first podium finish of the year, with German Nico Rosberg fourth for Williams.

Drivers world championship leader Briton Jenson Button of Brawn GP battled through to finish fifth ahead of his team-mate Brazilian Rubens Barrichello, the Brawn pair resisting a late charge from two-times world champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso of Renault.

Finn Heikki Kovalainen came home eighth for McLaren Mercedes.

Defending world champion Briton Lewis Hamilton finished 18th and last after a hot-headed attack on the opening lap saw him involved in a collision with Webber's Red Bull that cost him a puncture.

Webber bashed into Barrichello's car on the run from the start to the first corner, a collision for which he was punished with his drive-through penalty, but he overcame that with a dazzling drive to victory.

Kun going nowhere

SOCERNET

Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo has denied reports that Manchester United have made a player plus cash deal for highly-rated striker Sergio Aguero.

The 21-year-old Argentina international, who is under contract with Atletico until June 2012 and has a £47m buy-out clause, has been heavily linked with a move to Old Trafford as United looking to replenish their attack after losing Cristiano Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez.

Reports had claimed that the Premier League champions had offered £30m plus Portuguese winger Nani to tempt the Spanish Primera Division club to part with their prized asset but Cerezo insists no offer has been received.

"Manchester United has not made any offers for 'Kun' [Aguero] - and we will not sell any player," Cerezo told Marca.

The Atletico chief also outlined his determination to keep hold of Barcelona target Diego Forlan and Portugal winger Simao.

"We will not sell Aguero, Forlan, Simao - because we don't want to sell any of our players. We will keep all of our players because we are very good as we are and we have a great team."

It's important to get this cleared up and I will be speaking to Landon... over the next couple of days," Beckham said. "Me and Landon will talk, but that will be a private conversation."

Donovan told the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday that he wished he had spoken to Beckham rather than reveal his feelings to a reporter.

"I'm not going to apologize for the way I

Becks strikes back

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

England star midfielder David Beckham ripped Los Angeles Galaxy teammate Landon Donovan as unprofessional ahead of his return to the Major League Soccer squad on Monday.

US star Donovan criticized Beckham as stingy, selfish and a poor captain in book excerpts published last week in Sports Illustrated, with Beckham answering Saturday that Donovan should have come to him with the complaints first.

"It's unprofessional in my eyes," Beckham said. "In every soccer player's eyes throughout the world it would be unprofessional to speak about a teammate, especially in the press, and not to you face."

"But I'm going to turn it on a positive spin because that's what this needs. In 17 years, I have played with the biggest teams in the world and the biggest players and not once have I been criticized for my professionalism."

Beckham rejoins the Galaxy for practice on Monday ahead of his return match Thursday in New York and a home exhibition July 19 against AC Milan, the team for which Beckham was loaned for five months during the Italian season.

"It's important to get this cleared up and I will be speaking to Landon... over the next couple of days," Beckham said. "Me and Landon will talk, but that will be a private conversation."

Donovan told the Los Angeles Times on Wednesday that he wished he had spoken to Beckham rather than reveal his feelings to a reporter.

"I'm not going to apologize for the way I

felt," Donovan said. "What I feel badly about is that I should have been a man and told David how I felt as opposed to telling a reporter."

"Obviously, the lesson I learned is that it's not something that needs to be public. It's something we need to figure out within the team and it will get solved."

Beckham said he does not see any problem in working with Donovan, whose finishes would be vital to Beckham's precision centering kicks.

"I'm personally very professional when I am on the field," Beckham said. "I don't care what people say about me off the field. Once I'm on the field I'm professional and if there is a chance for him to score, I'll be giving him the ball."

The book, "The Beckham Experiment", hits shelves on Tuesday. Beckham said that he will not be among those reading it.

"This is an unofficial book that I have not participated in," Beckham said. "I haven't sat down one to one or spoken about the book so there is no comment where I have sat down with the journalist. There are many unofficial books that have been published about me, so this is just another one on the shelf."

Donovan said that reading the book would provide a better context for his criticism.

"What you don't get from reading a few excerpts and what you do get from reading the whole book is that we all want David to be here, we all want him to succeed, and he wants to succeed," Donovan said.

"Something happened at some point last year where a switch went off, and that's what I want to talk to him about, and we'll figure that out man to man."

"I think David's going to come back and play well regardless of what happens. I think he's motivated. I think he seems like he's rejuvenated and he's excited to come back."

Kaiser slams lunacy

Football

INTERNET, undated

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer said uncertainty over midfielder Franck Ribery at the club will probably last until the transfer window closes at the end of August. Criticizing "crazy" transfer payments, he told Saturday's Passauer Neue Presse daily he would have "a bad conscience" should Bayern obtain 80 million euros (111 million dollars) for Ribery, a sum the club would reportedly consider for the France international.

But the former playing great said he believed speculation over Ribery would continue until the end of August - well into the Bundesliga season which begins on August 7.

"Before the end of August there will not be a decision, then the transfer list closes," he said.

He added that Ribery "made the difference in his first year, but not longer in the second."

Ribery is wanted by Real Madrid and has also been linked with several other top European clubs including Chelsea.

Bayern have said officially that 26-year-old Ribery, who is under contract until 2011, is not for sale, but the record German champions are believed to be willing to consider an offer if

high enough.

Ribery was absent with a knee injury as Bayern drew 0-0 in a friendly at Red Bull Salzburg on Friday evening. Coach Louis van Gaal said he could not comment on Ribery's future.

"In the world of football I can't say," he said.

Real Madrid, who have already splashed out around 210 million euros this summer on Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Karim Benzema and Raul Albiol, have approached Bayern on Ribery but have reportedly balked at his price tag.

Beckenbauer, who is also on the executive committee of football's governing body FIFA, criticized the inflationary sums being paid in football.

"The sums being negotiated are crazy. But you will always find a lunatic throwing money around," he said.

He also called for action to rein in salaries but said he was "sceptical whether a salary cap would work." He suggested instead regulations restricting payments for players to be kept within 50 to 60 percent of a club's income.

"I am convinced that something will happen soon. In the financial and economic crisis in which so many people are fearful for their jobs and their existence what is happening at the moment is madness," he said.

Deco to stay and fight

Football

SOCERNET

Chelsea midfielder Deco is prepared to stay at the club after seeing Inter Milan withdraw their interest in him.

Deco described last season as the worst of his career and was desperate to join Inter, but the Italians insist they cannot afford him.

Now the 31-year-old Portugal international has hinted he may stay at Stamford Bridge for another two years.

"I am getting tired of Europe, but out of respect for Chelsea, I will stay on this continent a while longer," said Deco. "I have some offers from other clubs, but if I stay at Chelsea it's important that some things change because things happened last year that I did not like."

"I have had some adaptation problems in England and I've been sidelined with several injuries."

Meanwhile, new Chelsea striker Daniel Sturridge provided captain John Terry with more reasons why he should reject any thoughts of quitting Stamford Bridge to join his former club Manchester City.

The 19-year-old striker left big-spending

City to link-up with Carlo Ancelotti's Chelsea revolution insisting an ambition to win things and play in the Champions League was uppermost in his mind.

City have already had one £30million bid for Terry rejected but there is speculation a fresh offer of around £40million is in the pipeline.

But the lack of Champions League football at Eastlands was the biggest factor in Sturridge's decision to join the Blues and Terry should take note.

"My main motivation was to play in the Champions League," said Sturridge. "I am very ambitious and want to push myself to the highest level and play with the best in the world. I believe I can achieve big things at Chelsea."