



Former Holland midfielder Phillip Cocu (top) rides on the shoulders of ex-teammates Patrick Kluijver (R) and Jaap Stam as he thanks the fans in his farewell match against PSV Eindhoven on Saturday. A central midfielder of substance Cocu played for PSV and Barcelona during his illustrious career. He currently is the assistant coach of the Dutch national team.

Crouch on the move

AFP, London

Portsmouth manager Paul Hart confirmed Sunday they have accepted a bid from Tottenham for Peter Crouch.

"Obviously I'm disappointed to see Peter leave, but given the severe financial restraints in place here we had no choice but to accept an offer from Tottenham," Hart told the Daily Mirror.

"I think people need to realise that Pompey have been punching above their weight and could no longer sustain the level of spending that has gone on here over the last three years."

Spurs boss Harry Redknapp has apparently succeeded in reuniting the striker with his former Pompey partner Jermain Defoe for around 10 million pounds.

Hart, who last week signed a two-and-a-half year deal to remain with the south coast club, claimed it was a result of a bid to balance the books following a period of unrealistic spending under former manager Redknapp.

Hart also insisted that the takeover spearheaded by Dr Sulaiman Al Fahim would not lead to a Manchester City style spending spree.

"Even though a new owner is poised to come in our dealings in the market will be modest in comparison to the past," added Hart.

'Macheda can be key'

AFP, Hangzhou

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has backed Italian teenage star Federico Macheda to make a real impact at the club this season after a brace of goals during their Asian tour.

The 17-year-old, who already has hero status after scoring a stunning injury-time winner on his debut against Aston Villa in April, struck his second goal in as many starts during United's pre-season tour in Friday's 3-2 win over FC Seoul.

Ferguson may see Wayne Rooney, Dimitar Berbatov and fresh signing Michael Owen as his main striking options for the English Premier League champions but he rates the Italian highly.

"The goal Macheda scored was excellent," Ferguson said following the match, according to the official Manchester United website.

"The lad has a real chance. His movement is very good and he does well when he gets onto the shoulder of the last defender."

"He took his goal very well. It's pleasing to see our strikers scoring -- obviously the main players are Rooney, Berbatov and Owen and I'm very comfortable with that."

"But if Macheda continues his progress then it gives me a big advantage. An extra player like that will do us the world of good."

United wrap up their Asian tour with a match against Hangzhou Greentown on Sunday, looking for a clean sweep after two wins in Malaysia and one in South Korea.

Much to do for Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid has still not determined what its final squad and its starting 11 will be for the upcoming season, new coach Manuel Pellegrini said Saturday.

The Spanish giants spent over 200 million euros on new players in the pre-season, including Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Kaka, and earlier this month Pellegrini said he hoped to have the final squad ironed out by July 27 when all of the club's internationals returned from holidays.

"I said that, but I added that it was important not to make mistakes, that we should make the right decisions. We'll wait longer if we must," the Chilean coach told a news conference ahead of Real's friendly at home Sunday against Saudi Arabian side Al-Ittihad.

"I wish the squad was tighter by now, but it isn't a big deal. We train normally and there is a good atmosphere in the team. Every player tries to do his best. Our duty is to do the same job with every footballer we have and we'll keep on doing so," he added.

Real's spending spree has left it with an overcrowded dressing room as the club has been less successful at offloading players than it has been at recruiting new ones.

Pellegrini repeated Real's desire to sell its Dutch striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, who has

been linked with a move to Stuttgart and more recently with Tottenham.

"I've spoken to every player and Huntelaar knows what I want. We have many strikers on the team and they can't all stay. Everybody knows how good he is. We have an excess of strikers right now and he knows there is no place for him," he said.

Argentine defender Gabriel Heinze is also on the "for sale" list, but the size of his wage packet is proving an obstacle. Marseille were interested in the player but cooled off when confronted with a 4.2 million euro price tag.

Pellegrini included Ronaldo and Benzema in his 20-man squad for the match on Sunday against Al-Ittihad.

If Ronaldo is sent on the pitch it will be the first time that he plays for Real at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium since his record-setting transfer from Manchester United last month.

"We haven't started to try out a defined starting 11 yet. Ronaldo will sometimes play down the wing and will sometimes be positioned as a striker. He is comfortable anywhere in attack," said Pellegrini.

"These are friendly games in which we aren't looking for a starting lineup," he added.

Ronaldo made his debut for Real last week as they eked out a 1-0 victory over Shamrock Rovers in Ireland. Benzema scored the winner.

The 24-year-old Portuguese winger was taken off at half-time having failed to sparkle against some muscular defending.

Carlo cool on Terry

AFP, London

SOCCERNET

Chelsea manager Carlo Ancelotti has urged people to trust him when he says John Terry will remain at Stamford Bridge.

The England captain has been linked with a British record move to big-spending Manchester City, with the Londoners having already rejected formal interest from Mark Hughes' men.

Ancelotti was adamant when he first arrived at the club that Terry was a "symbol" of Chelsea and must be kept, and when asked again about the player's future on their pre-season tour of the United States, he said: "We have to wait and for some people, it's a problem to wait."

"But for sure, Terry will stay at Chelsea - we

never had a problem. You have to have trust in me."

Chelsea striker Didier Drogba - who looks set to stay with the club after his own future was in doubt earlier this summer - added: "He's our captain and we need him. We know he's going to stay with us."

Meanwhile, midfielder Frank Lampard does not think his club after his own future was in doubt earlier this summer - added: "He's our captain and we need him. We know he's going to stay with us."

"I don't think it is a necessity now for us to go out and spend a ridiculous amount of money trying to find the perfect signing," he told the Sunday Mirror.

"Of course, there's a couple of players out there who would add a lot to this team."

"But there are millions of players who would not add much to this squad because we are strong across the board."

Fergie blasts City

AFP, Hangzhou

Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson has labelled big-spending Manchester City a "small club" who are "arrogant" and "stupid" as his side prepare to wrap up their Asian tour Sunday.

In an interview with English newspapers during United's pre-season tour, the Scot said it would be tricky for City to break into the Premier League's top four despite their huge summer spending spree.

And he expressed anger at a prominent city-centre billboard in Manchester that says "Welcome to Manchester" under a sky-blue graphic of Argentina's Carlos Tevez, who crossed to United's bitter rivals this summer.

"The billboard? It's City isn't it?" said Ferguson, quoted in the Sunday Mirror.

"They are a small club, with a small mentality. All they can talk about is Manchester United. That's all they've ever done and they can't get away from it."

"What they are doing now is just stupid," he said.

"That arrogance will be rewarded in the right

way. It is a goal at us. That's the only thing it is."

"They think taking Tevez away from Manchester United is a triumph."

"It is poor stuff, although I thought he would go to City a long time ago."

Ferguson said City's biggest triumph was getting the players to Eastlands and that they had gone there because of the money.

"I don't know if they will do anything. It is not easy to get in that top four so the biggest success of all is to just get the players there. They might not get beyond that," he said, according to the Independent on Sunday.

"They have come because of the money. That is the big attraction to people nowadays. That is the reason they have gone there."

"At the last minute, from what I can gather, Emmanuel Adebayor or his agent phoned us after he had agreed a deal with City and then he did the same to Chelsea. You ask why is he going to Manchester City and it can only be for one reason. He was desperate to get to Chelsea and he was desperate to get to us."

Ferguson said Arsenal faced a challenge to their top-four status but that might not come from Manchester City but from Everton or Aston Villa instead.

Zlatan to be unveiled Monday

SOCCERNET

Zlatan Ibrahimovic could be presented as a Barcelona player on Monday if no late complications arise over his switch from Inter Milan, the Primera Division club has confirmed.

Ibrahimovic is due to arrive in Barcelona on Sunday to put the finishing touches on his move, which includes the Sweden striker undergoing a medical with the European champions on Monday morning.

If all goes well and the deal is finalised then the 27-year-old could be officially unveiled by Barca in the Sala Paris at the Nou Camp on Monday evening.

Barca have agreed to pay Inter a reported \$45m plus Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o in exchange for Ibrahimovic, with Alexander Hleb also set to join the Italian side on loan.

Meanwhile, Barca midfielder Yaya Toure believes the former Ajax and Juventus hitman will be a more than useful addition to the treble winners' squad, saying: "He is a very tall and skilful striker and his characteristics can help us a lot."

Mido all set to leave Boro

AFP, London

Egypt striker Mido is set to quit Middlesbrough after the Championship side revealed on Sunday they have accepted an undisclosed offer from an unnamed club.

The 26-year-old was fined earlier this week for returning to pre-season training two weeks late following the north-east outfit's relegation from the Premier League.

Gareth Southgate had already admitted he was resigned to seeing Mido and Tuncay exit this summer, and the Boro boss revealed there has also been an upturn in enquiries for the Turkey international forward.

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Formula 1 Hamilton breaks drought

AFP, Budapest

Defending world champion Lewis Hamilton finally ended his winless run Sunday when he came home triumphant for McLaren in the Hungarian Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old Englishman, who started from fourth on the grid, drove a near-faultless race to claim victory for the first time since last year's Chinese Grand Prix. It was the 10th win of his career.

Hamilton's win endorsed emphatically the McLaren team's return to form after a

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Adebayor blanks on debut

AFP, Pretoria

Emmanuel Adebayor failed to score on his debut as Manchester City fell 1-0 to Kaizer Chiefs Saturday in the Vodacom Challenge final.

The 25-million-pound signing from Arsenal came closest early in the second half at Loftus Versfeld when he pounced on a clearance and rounded a defender only to fire over.

Other new strikers Carlos Tevez and Roque Santa Cruz were not used by City while ex-Aston Villa midfielder Gareth Barry was the only player from the big-spending English Premiership outfit to have a first-half shot on target.

Chiefs won a lively match through a 42nd-minute goal from defender Jeffrey Ntuka with some City players claiming he controlled the ball with a hand before firing home.

City manager Mark Hughes gave starting places to goalkeeper Shay Given and defender-cum-captain Richard Dunne for the first time on the eight-day tour to the 2010 FIFA World Cup host nation.

Republic of Ireland international Given was hardly troubled before Ntuka struck while Dunne was substituted by Pablo Zabaleta after 37 minutes on a chilly, clear winter afternoon in the Highveld city.

The first half looked set to end goalless until

Chiefs went ahead after Given dived low to his left and pushed away a Nkosinathi Nhleko shot at the expense of a corner.

City failed to clear the third corner forced by the South Africans and the ball took a deflection off a head to Ntuka lurking at the far post and he drove the ball into the opposite corner of the net.

After forcing their only corner of the half a minute before the break, City substitute Ben Haim headed wide while Togolese Adebayor committed a stoppage-time foul when he battled for possession in the goalmouth.

In the second half it took City just two minutes to force a corner as they sought an equaliser and Adebayor should have done better on 55 minutes than blazing over from an acute angle when a rebound fell into his path.

Hughes brought on Brazilian Robinho for Bulgarian Martin Petrov, but Chiefs held their own as they sought to end a Premiership dominance of the trophy after Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur won the last two editions.

Reigning African Footballer of the Year Adebayor had a half chance 12 minutes from full-time when he connected with a deep cross, but his timid header was comfortably held by well-positioned Itumeleng Khune.

The Premiership club lost 2-0 to Orlando Pirates in Polokwane and won 1-0 against Chiefs in Durban in earlier matches on their first visit to South Africa in 16 years.

'Bayern should have signed 'keeper'

AFP, London

SOCCERNET

Former Bayern Munich midfielder Stefan Effenberg believes the club could live to regret not signing a new goalkeeper.

Effenberg captained Bayern to their last Champions League triumph in 2001 when Oliver Kahn was between the sticks, but his replacement Michael Rensing failed to meet expectations last term.

"I would invest \$20m in a really good goalkeeper," Effenberg said. "I would have tried to sign Tim Wiese from Werder Bremen. He has a good presence, has international experience and is not scared to open his mouth."

Instead, Bayern will go into the new season with the same goalkeepers as last season - Rensing and veteran Hans-Jorg Butt.

Although that position worries Effenberg,

he is impressed by the quality of the rest of Louis van Gaal's squad, particularly since Franck Ribery has not been sold.

And the 41-year-old believes the team should be built around the Frenchman - pursued by Real Madrid over the summer - this season.

"He has got to be given total freedom otherwise that would damage him and the team," he told the Berliner Zeitung newspaper. "He will always move out onto the wing to do what he does best."

Effenberg is convinced Ribery will "get back to his best quickly" despite his apparent reluctance to remain with the club this summer.

Effenberg also backed the sale of Brazil defender Lucio to Inter Milan.

"He bore the main responsibility for the bad defence (last season)," added Effenberg. "As a defender, you must play in the defence and you are not allowed to race 50 yards forward to score goals."

"It was right to sell him."

Kuszczyk wants starting role

AFP, Hangzhou

Manchester United's Tomasz Kuszczyk has his sights set on succeeding Edwin van der Sar as the club's first-choice goalkeeper, despite competition from England international Ben Foster.

The Polish stopper conceded twice against FC Seoul on Friday but could do little about either goal and overall put in a solid performance.

Kuszczyk, who has made 37 appearances in three years for the English Premier League champions, told MUTV he hopes boss Sir Alex Ferguson took note of the performance.

"I've been trying my hardest to impress the manager for three years now and I hope this year I can impress him so much that he gives me more and more chances to show what I can do," he said.

"Pre-season is an important environment for me because I can get some games and work hard."

"I'm at United to play games and I want to be a regular here. That's my focus. I feel settled here in the team and I feel I'm making steps forward all the time. I hope this will be a good season for me."

Kuszczyk said the Red Devils' Asian tour, which ends with a match against Hangzhou Greentown on Sunday, had been a success but he was disappointed that the club missed out on playing in Jakarta.

A scheduled match there was called off after the hotel the team were due to stay in was bombed in suicide attacks.

"The trip has been great, although it's disappointing we couldn't get to Indonesia," he said.

"I hope we end up there at some stage, however, because we know we have a lot of supporters there and it would be nice to play in front of them."

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Aston Villa winger Ashley Young (R) fights for the ball against Malaga's Xavier Torres (L) during their Peace Cup match at the Rosaleda Stadium on Saturday. Malaga won 1-0.