

Roman did the trick

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry admits Blues owner Roman Abramovich played a key role in persuading him to reject Manchester City's blockbuster bid.

City offered 30 million pounds (50 million dollars) for Terry and were prepared to make the Chelsea and England captain the highest paid player in the Premier League on wages of 250,000 pounds (412,000 dollars) a week.

After spending his whole career at Stamford Bridge, the centre-back did consider whether it was time for a change, but Abramovich's personal intervention was enough to keep him in west London.

The Russian rarely speaks in public but he was quick to reassure his star player that he intends to give new boss Carlo Ancelotti funds to keep Chelsea in contention for the title and that convinced Terry to stay.

"Of course I thought about things, I was very flattered City wanted to sign me," Terry told The Sun.

"But when you get a call from your own club saying no matter what money they won't sell you, it's unbelievable. And to hear it from the owner himself - that's the kind of relationship you can't buy.

"You can't put a price on things like that and all the lads and the staff were all around me.

"The manager as well, friends and family all know my situation. They know I love the club so much, and that side of things, so it's never an issue.

"So it's nice to be able to talk to friends and

family and know you'll get honest answers."

The 28-year-old is likely to be rewarded for his loyalty with an improved contract putting him on parity with Frank Lampard, the club's highest paid player on around 150,000 pounds a week.

Terry believes Abramovich's desire for success is as strong as when he bought the club in 2003 and he hopes to build his own relationship with the Russian in years to come.

"It is strange actually because never before have myself and Frank (Lampard) and people like Didier (Drogba) had that communication with him," Terry said.

"Mr Abramovich is a very successful businessman and makes all the final decisions. He likes to have the opinion of the players.

"We are the ones living and breathing the football life and he can make a really small improvement for us on or off the pitch if he tries to do it.

"And he wants to know the feedback from the lads - what is working and what's not.

"It's hard sometimes because people think me and other key players in the team are going in and demanding this and that.

"But when you've got someone coming in after games demanding to know why we didn't play well and why we didn't score two or three goals or why this happened or that happened, you can sit down and talk a bit.

"It's great because he understands football. He watches so many games and understands the game very well and he has put an awful lot in.

"He wants to know why and how we can improve, all the time. I think it's great we can have that relationship with him."

Jose wants to replace Sir Alex

AFP, London

Inter Milan coach Jose Mourinho admitted Tuesday that he would jump at the chance to step into Sir Alex Ferguson's shoes at Manchester United.

Mourinho's name has been mentioned frequently since his exit from Chelsea as a replacement for Ferguson, should the 67-year-old Scot decide to retire.

"I would consider going to Manchester United but United have to consider if they want me to succeed Sir Alex Ferguson," Mourinho told the Daily Mirror. "If they do, then of course.

"I like England, where the fans are very passionate and make the game a beautiful occasion with such an incredible atmosphere."

Mourinho guided Chelsea to back-to-back championships.

However since the Portuguese's controversial exit two years ago, Chelsea are now onto their fourth manager and have failed to recapture the title, while he has now won Serie A as well with Inter.

"I had many conversations before Chelsea and I decided on a divorce," he said. "It was difficult for me because we loved each other but the relationship went in one direction and it was best for everyone.

"Since I left I became champion again but they have not been champions again. I keep on winning and they don't."

Ronaldo breaks his hand

AFP, Sao Paulo

Three-time FIFA player of the year Ronaldo will be sidelined for at least five weeks while he recovers from a double fracture of his left hand, his Brazilian club Corinthians said on Monday.

The 32-year-old striker - a two-time World Cup winner and all-time leading World Cup finals scorer - suffered the injury when he fell during a match against rivals Palmeiras, the club's doctor Paolo de Faria said.

The former PSV Eindhoven, Barcelona, Real Madrid and AC Milan star had been making a gradual return to form since joining the Brazilian team in December.

The injury-prone striker was enjoying a rare seven-match run free of medical problems until the latest accident happened.

Last week it was announced that the three-time world player of the year was to star in a film about a Palestinian child fan of his who dies in a refugee camp.

Ronaldo was scheduled to be with his club Corinthians in the Middle East - for a September 15 friendly in the Palestinian Territories against fellow Brazilians Fluminense.

Arbeloa close to Real return

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool's Spanish international Alvaro Arbeloa said Tuesday that a deal which would see him return to Real Madrid could be completed by the end of the week.

"At present I am only focused on Liverpool but it is true that the transfer deal is nearly completed," the 26-year-old full-back said in an interview published in sports daily Marca.

"We will see what will happen in the next few days, if we can all make an effort so that the operation takes place and be something good for everyone, which is what we all want. It could all be sorted out this week."

Rival sports daily AS said the transfer deal will be worth four million euros (5.7 million dollars).

Last week Real's managing director said the club's lavish recruitment drive, which has seen over 200 million euros spent on big-names such as Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo, would stop until players departed to create vacancies.

Arbeloa, part of the Spain squad which won Euro 2008, joined Liverpool from Deportivo La Coruna in January 2007.

He signed for Deportivo from Real in 2006, having failed to make an impact in his first spell at the Spanish giants when he played for its youth team.



Barcelona's new signing Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic waves to the fans, wearing his new jersey, after signing a five-year contract with Barca at Nou Camp on Monday.

Ibra 'living a dream'

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic signed a five-year contract with Barcelona Monday and said he is finally "living a dream."

The 27-year-old was transferred from Inter Milan in a deal which will also see Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o move the other way and the Italian side receive 46 million euros as well as Alexander Hleb on loan.

"It feels like I'm living a dream now," Ibrahimovic told a news conference.

"It was not easy for me in the last weeks," he said he had always insisted that "only one club can buy me and that is Barcelona... My will to come to Barcelona was too big for staying in Inter Milan."

"It is a big honour. There are many big clubs but there is only one special club," he said, adding that he hoped to develop his skills playing with such players as Lionel Messi and Xavi Hernandez.

"I come here to bring something new. I'm

here to win and I'll do my best to win," he said.

Ibrahimovic will on Tuesday undergo an operation on a broken bone in his hand, suffered during a friendly between Inter and Chelsea during the club's US tour, Barca's technical director Txiki Begiristain said.

Wearing the "number 9" shirt formerly held by Eto'o, he later received a rapturous welcome before tens of thousands of fans at the Camp Nou stadium.

Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola has said Ibrahimovic won't be the club's last major signing before the end of the transfer window.

And he has warned big-spending rivals Real Madrid that his side won't give up their reign as European and Spanish champions without a fight.

Real have spent at least 209 million euros this summer on Kaka, Cristiano Ronaldo, Raul Albiol and Karim Benzema during the close season.

Barcelona beat holders Manchester United to win their third Champions League crown in May in Rome. The club also won the domestic league and cup last season, making them the first Spanish team to win the treble.

Eto'o signs Inter deal

Football

AFP, Rome

Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o has signed a five-year contract with Inter Milan, the Italian champions announced on Monday.

The 28-year-old had arrived in Milan on Monday morning to take a medical examination before then officially signing on the dotted line, on the same day that Zlatan Ibrahimovic finalised his move in the opposite direction by joining Barcelona.

Inter did not reveal how much the Cameroon striker will be paid but he is believed to have signed a deal worth 10-10.5 million euros net per season.

He is part of a swap deal that sees Swedish international striker Ibrahimovic head to Catalonia while Inter also pocket 46 million euros and take Belarus winger Alexander Hleb on loan for a year.

Upon arriving at Milan's Linate airport, Eto'o claimed he was coming to Inter to win a third Champions League crown.

Eto'o has twice already been on a Champions League winning team with Barcelona, scoring against Arsenal in the 2006 final in a 2-1 victory and again against Manchester

United in May in a 2-0 success. "I'm very happy to be here at Inter. I've come here to work hard and win the Champions League," said Eto'o.

"I had the opportunity to spend 13 years in Spain. Today, I am ready to begin a new adventure."

"I want to thank the president (of Inter Massimo) Moratti who helped my arrival a lot."

"I hope to deliver what he's expecting from me. He's a man with a lot of heart."

Eto'o also congratulated his new team-mates on having beaten city rivals AC Milan 2-0 in a friendly in the United States on Sunday.

He joined Barcelona in 2004 having previously been on Real Madrid's books before being sent to Mallorca.



Brazil superstar Ronaldo (L) of Corinthians screams with pain after suffering a double fracture of his left hand during their match against Palmeiras in Sao Paulo on Sunday.

Dzeko pines for Milan

Football

SOCCERNET

Wolfsburg striker Edin Dzeko still has his heart set on a move to AC Milan, even though he is resigned to staying at Wolfsburg this season.

The Bosnian striker was a crucial part in Wolfsburg's Bundesliga-winning side last season, scoring 26 goals.

Dzeko's prolific form alerted Milan, but his club refused to let him make the switch to Serie A - much to the forward's disappointment.

"I am 23 years old and I receive an offer from the club I have always dreamed about - it was only honest for me to say I wanted to go there," he said.

"I stand by what I said. I was fascinated with this club from when I was a little boy. I don't know why, but AC Milan was always the biggest team in the world for me. I always wanted to go there."

Despite stating his preference to join the Rossoneri, Dzeko was told that he would be going nowhere and that he should instead concentrate on fulfilling the remaining two

years of his contract.

Nevertheless, Dzeko expects the opportunity to join Milan to present itself again next summer.

"You don't always get what you want in life, at least not straight away," he told the Welt newspaper. "It was the club's right to say no. That's just the way things are."

"I am not mad with Wolfsburg in any way and am not going to cause any commotion. I am staying here and will try to play even better next year than I have up to now. What happens after that remains to be seen."

"I will always dream [about Milan]."

Although Dzeko would still love the chance to join Milan, he remains focused on Wolfsburg and has not ruled out extending his contract with the Bundesliga champions.

"I am happy in Wolfsburg, so why not?" he said.

Wolfsburg coach Armin Veh confirmed that talks over a new contract are under way and that he hopes a decision can be taken within a week, which is also Dzeko's desire.

"I want the talks to be concluded before the start of the season so that I can concentrate on the games," he added.

Ribery to miss season start

Football

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's French star Franck Ribery is likely to be unavailable for the first match of the Bundesliga season on August 8 against Hoffenheim, the club said on Tuesday.

The 26-year-old midfielder has had a succession of medical problems since he resumed training at the beginning of this month, including blistered feet and a knee injury, preventing him from joining in full training since July 12.

"Franck has a lot of catching-up to do. He trained hard and went further than last week but it has been limited nevertheless," said Bayern manager Louis Van Gaal on the club's website.

The Dutchman added that if Ribery did play in the Hoffenheim match, it would be for a maximum of 20 minutes.

The France international will also miss the first round of the German Cup next Sunday when Bayern play Neckarelz.

Other Munich players on the injured list are Croatian striker Ivica Olic and fellow forward Luca Toni of Italy who has a damaged Achilles tendon.

The giant south German

club has rejected approaches for Ribery during the inter-season period, notably from Real Madrid who balked at Bayern's asking price of 80 million euros.



Bayern Munich's French midfielder Franck Ribery (2nd from R) arrives for a group picture of the team presentation in Munich on Tuesday.

Deschamps, Morientes reunited

AFP, Marseille

Valencia's veteran Spanish striker Fernando Morientes joined French giants Marseille on Monday and was reunited with his former coach, Didier Deschamps.

The pair worked together at Monaco - where Morientes goals played a large part in Monaco reaching the 2004 Champions League final - and Deschamps believes the experienced 33-year-old can make a crucial impact at the Velodrome next season.

"Fernando has the physical freshness and hunger for the top level," Deschamps told the media here on Monday as he welcomed the arrival of another signing, midfielder Fabrice Abriel from Lorient.

"If we'd wanted to sign a 20-goal a season striker he (Morientes) would have cost us 15 million euros. We couldn't do that."

"I'm not saying by that that Fernando is a second best option. I know him well. But he's not going to be playing 40 games for 90 minutes, we'll have to prepare him."

Deschamps dismissed suggestions that at his age Morientes' best days were behind him.

"I know that in France we tend to have doubts when we're discussing players over 30. But Fernando isn't worn out, and just look at the impact of (Filippo) Inzaghi or (Alessandro) Del Piero, who are 36 and 35."

"If we'd signed him three years ago he would have been inaccessible in terms of the transfer fee and his salary."

Morientes, who has also had a spell with Liverpool, is expected to sign for two years or for one year with the option to extend his tenure at the south coast giants by a further 12 months.

Last week Marseille said goodbye to their Albanian captain Lorik Cana who moved to Premier League side Sunderland in a reported five million pound deal.

Perez to practice prudence

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid president Florentino Perez claims he is ready to walk away from deals this summer if asking prices remain high.

Liverpool are reported to want £30million for Spain midfielder Xabi Alonso, substantially above Real's valuation.

Perez insists that despite his club's massive outlay on the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo

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Schumi could be Massa fill-in

INTERNET, undated

Ferrari team principal Stefano Domenicali has not ruled out the possibility of seven-time Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher coming out of retirement as a temporary replacement for Felipe Massa. "It would be wrong to say yes or no at this stage," Domenicali told the Tagesspiegel newspaper Monday when asked about the chance of Schumacher returning to the track for the European Grand Prix in Valencia on August 23.

"We will think about it this week."

Massa remains in a Budapest hospital after being hit on the helmet by a piece of flying debris from the car of Brawn GP's Rubens Barrichello during qualifying Saturday for the Hungarian Grand Prix.

The Brazilian suffered a fractured skull and concussion but a spokesman for the Hungarian Defence Ministry said on local television on Monday that Massa was now able to move his arms and legs.

"This can be taken as a good sign," Istvan Bocsikai said.

Bocsikai noted that, although the signs were good that Massa could make a full recovery, it was still too early to make a final declaration on his condition.

Schumacher won two F1 world titles with Benetton before moving to Ferrari in 1996 where he won five consecutive drivers' crowns from 2000-2004.

The 39-year-old German retired at the end of the 2006 season but has remained with Ferrari as an advisor.



AS Roma captain Francesco Totti poses with a shirt bearing the number of goals he scored at Campidoglio in Rome on Monday. Totti signed a new five-year contract with the capital-based club.