



PHOTO: AFP

Bayern Munich midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger is about to shoot during a friendly match against AC Milan in Munich on Wednesday.

## Zola keen on Balotelli

SOCCERNET

Gianfranco Zola says he has tried "everything" to sign Inter Milan's Mario Balotelli and that it would be in the best interests of the striker to join West Ham United.

Hammers boss Zola is keen to improve his striking options, with Carlton Cole currently his only senior fit front man.

The other options contain Dean Ashton, who is working his way back to fitness, Savio Nsereko who is still unproven, while David Di Michele and Diego Tristan left Upton Park at the end of last season.

Zola has now lined up a move for volatile teenage ace Balotelli, who has struggled to make an impact for Inter since Jose Mourinho took over as coach and has made more negative headlines than good.

"I have done everything I can to sign Mario," said Zola. "It would be in both our interests if he came to West Ham."

"There's no place for him at Inter and he's a natural talent. He is extroverted and knows his attitude can upset people, but he's intelligent and still learning to handle situations."

## Elano moves to Galatasaray

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City playmaker Elano has joined Turkish side Galatasaray for an undisclosed fee, the Premier League club confirmed on Thursday.

Brazil star Elano was a fans' favourite at Eastlands when he joined the club from Shakhtar Donetsk two years ago, but he decided to move on after falling out of favour with manager Mark Hughes last season.

"Manchester City can confirm that Elano has completed his transfer to Turkish side Galatasaray," a statement on the club's website announced.

He may have struggled to hold down a regular place in the City team this season after Hughes's spending spree on the likes of Carlos Tevez, Emmanuel Adebayor and Roque Santa Cruz.

The 28-year-old, who is believed to have cost Galatasaray around eight million pounds, scored 18 goals in 80 appearances for City.

# Bayern maul Milan

SOCCERNET

Bayern Munich demolished AC Milan with a fine display of confident, attacking football on their first appearance at the Allianz Arena since Louis van Gaal took over.

Nineteen-year-old striker Thomas Muller grabbed a brace as the record German champions taught the Italians a lesson with a comfortable 4-1 win.

Bastian Schweinsteiger and Saer Sene were also on target for Bayern with a free-kick from Andrea Pirlo Milan's only consolation.

Bayern will now meet Manchester United in the final of the Audi Cup tomorrow night with Milan contending third place with Boca Juniors.

Bayern took the game to their Italian opponents from the very beginning with Muller, the young revelation of their pre-season, terrorising Milan's experienced defender Alessandro Nesta, a man 14 years his senior.

He broke the deadlock after 12 minutes with a predatory finish that his legendary namesake Gerd Muller would have been proud of to conclude a fluid team move.

Hamid Altintop slotted the ball through for Jose Ernesto Sosa, who dragged the ball back from the goal line for Muller to sidefoot in from point-blank range.

Mario Gomez had a string of opportunities to add to the early lead, but he was unable to put the finishing touch to another impressive team move which involved Philipp Lahm and Muller on the half-hour mark.

Gomez then nicked a Daniel Pranjic cross just wide of the far post from close range with Nesta in close attention as Bayern tore Milan to shreds, albeit without converting their dominance into goals.

At the other end, Giuseppe Favalli did find the back of the net a minute before the break

but the goal was ruled out for offside.

The hosts continued to take the game to their guests, who were clearly suffering after a tiring tour of the USA came to an end only early yesterday morning.

Half-time substitute Schweinsteiger inspired Gomez to another chance which he dragged just wide of Marco Storari's goal while on the stretch while Thiago Silva almost put the ball in his own goal as he cut out a low cross from Lahm.

There was another flash of danger at the other end with Martin Demichelis heading over the crossbar as his team mates just looked on believing the ball had already gone out of play.

Schweinsteiger then grabbed a deserved second goal for Bayern with a touch of individual skill.

He left Gennaro Gattuso, Massimo Oddo and Kakha Kaladze all on the floor before placing his shot calmly past Storari into the bottom corner from 15 yards.

A goalkeeping error by Hans-Jorg Butt allowed Milan an unexpected route back into the game less than two minutes later.

He flapped at Pirlo's 25-yard free-kick and could only push the ball into the roof of his own goal.

But a grandstand finish enabled Bayern to move comfortably into tomorrow's final against Manchester United.

Young substitute Sene, making his first ever appearance in the first team just 24 hours after scoring the equaliser for Bayern's reserves in their third division match, opened his account for the club in style.

His initial shot was saved by Storari, but the ball fell for Muller, Sene's former team mate in the youth team, who unselfishly laid the ball back into the 22-year-old's path, giving him an easy tap-in from close range.

And there was another tap-in for Muller in the last minute from Alexander Baumjohann's cross to complete a deserved rout of the Rossoneri.

# Harry still after duo

SOCCERNET

AFP, Beijing

Tottenham Hotspur manager Harry Redknapp said Thursday he was still keen to sign Real Madrid striker Klaas Jan Huntelaar and Inter Milan's Patrick Vieira.

If Huntelaar was available Redknapp said he would be interested in having him at Spurs to keep his other star strikers, including new signing Peter Crouch, on their toes.

"Huntelaar is not definitely a no-go. It's still a possibility. It just depends what happens," he said here where Spurs are playing in the Barclays Asia Trophy.

"His goal scoring record is incredible. And if he's available, then he interests me."

London rivals Arsenal are also reported to be after the 25-year-old Dutchman but Redknapp said he would not hesitate to snap him up.

"I'm looking around for a striker. We're looking for a push this year, so I am looking to improve the squad. I have brought Peter Crouch in. I will not hesitate to add to the squad if the right player became available," he said.

Redknapp added that he was not worried about upsetting his other forwards -- Robbie Keane, Jermain Defoe and Crouch.

"It's their job to keep me and the fans happy. It's what they're paid to do," he said.

"It's a good thing to have a competitive

dresser room. I am not worried about making my strikers unhappy. They have to fight to play."

Redknapp, meanwhile, showed surprise when told Arsenal had reportedly made an approach for Vieira.

"Is that true? That is surprising. That's the first I have heard about it," he said, reiterating that he wanted to sign the former Gunners legend and had held talks with his representatives.

"He'll be a good player for whichever team he signs for," he added.

When asked if he would be disappointed if Vieira went to Arsenal, Redknapp laughed.

"He belonged to Arsenal, he was a fantastic player. I am sure if the opportunity came to go back to the club, then he'll probably take it," he said.

"But I don't know. I have not spoken to anyone about this. It could be a rumour. We don't know."

Redknapp joked with reporters about the on-off departure of Darren Bent to Sunderland after the player left the Spurs squad minutes before the team's plane took off for Beijing on Monday.

"I don't know where Bent is at. He was still talking to Sunderland as far as I know," he said, adding that he believed the deal had been done.

"But when I went to bed last night, which was about 5.30pm English time, I still didn't know."

## Alonso hands in transfer request

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso has handed in a transfer request in an attempt to seal a move to Real Madrid, according to reports in England on Thursday.

Real are keen to make Alonso their latest big-money signing but Liverpool boss Rafael Benitez has been holding out for a 35 million pounds transfer fee.

However, the Spanish club aren't willing to pay more than 28 million pounds and the Liverpool Echo claims Alonso has tried to force Benitez to sell by asking to leave.

Benitez is now believed to want Alonso, who is due back for training on Thursday after a short holiday at his San Sebastian home, to either complete the move or commit to Liverpool by the week-end.

On Wednesday Liverpool sold defender Alvaro Arbeloa to Real for 3.5 million pounds and they expect the delayed four million pounds move of Andrea Dossena to Napoli to be concluded by the week-end.

## Hleb loaned to Stuttgart

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona midfielder Alexander Hleb, unhappy at being loaned to Inter Milan as part of the Samuel Eto'o-Zlatan Ibrahimovic deal - has instead secured a one year loan to Stuttgart.

The German side will pay the 28-year-old Belarus international's estimated four million euros in its entirety, according to Barcelona.

Hleb, who joined the European and Spanish champions from Arsenal in 2008, has not travelled with the rest of the Barcelona squad on their pre-season tour of the United States, the Catalan side said Thursday.

His switch from an intended loan to Inter means the cost for Barcelona of getting Swedish striker Ibrahimovic is now put at 68 million euros: 45m for Ibrahimovic, 20m - the price Eto'o is valued at, and three million euros in place of Hleb.

## Villa cruise into semis

AFP, Seville

English Premier League side Aston Villa eased into the Peace Cup semifinals on Wednesday with a 3-1 victory over Mexican outfit Atlante.

The up and coming English outfit - a rising force under former Celtic handler Martin O'Neill - will meet Portugal's 2004 Champions League winners Porto in the semifinals.

Porto eked out a 0-0 draw with Turkish side Besiktas, which was enough to see them through to Friday's semi-final in Malaga.

Villa encountered few problems against Atlante with Norwegian international John Carew grabbing their second in the 48th minute and Ashley Young wrapped it up in the 62nd minute.

The other semifinal in Seville also on Friday features Italian powerhouses Juventus and Spanish giants Real Madrid.

# City seal Toure deal

SOCCERNET

AFP, Manchester

Kolo Toure became Manchester City's latest big-money signing on Wednesday as the Ivory Coast defender completed his move from Arsenal.

The 28-year-old passed a medical before putting pen to paper on a four-year contract worth an estimated 100,000 pounds a week.

"Manchester City are delighted to announce that Kolo Toure has joined from Arsenal," a statement on City's website confirmed.

The central defender who spent seven years with the Gunners has signed a four-year contract and becomes the sixth summer signing.

City manager Mark Hughes turned to Toure after Chelsea captain John Terry rejected a move to Eastlands and Gunners boss Arsene Wenger, who signed Belgian defender Thomas Vermaelen from Ajax in June, decided to accept the bid of around 15 million pounds.

"I am delighted to welcome Kolo to Manchester City," Hughes said. "It is no secret that we have been looking to strengthen our defence and in Kolo I feel we have recruited a world class player."

"He brings a wealth of Premier League experience from his seven seasons with Arsenal."

"Kolo has been a central figure in a very strong Arsenal team for many years and I have been an admirer of him for a long time."

"He is strong, quick, reads the game well and will be an influential figure in the dressing room."

Toure is City's sixth signing of the close-season, joining former Arsenal team-mate Emmanuel Adebayor, Carlos Tevez, Roque Santa Cruz, Gareth Barry and goalkeeper Stuart Taylor.

Hughes, backed by the club's billionaire Abu Dhabi-based owners, has now spent nearly 100 million pounds on new players as he tries to establish City as a top four team in the Premier League.

Toure struggled to find his best form last season after returning from the African Nations Cup and found himself played at right-back before being briefly dropped.

But the Ivorian, who arrived at Arsenal in 2002, was a member of the 'Invincibles' team that went through the entire 38-game Premier League campaign in 2003-04 without losing a match.

Meanwhile, City defender Nedum Onuoha signed a new five-year contract with the club on Wednesday to end reports he may move to Everton as part of a swap deal for Joleon Lescott.

Onuoha, 22, told City's website: "This is a season that we will be looking right towards the top of the table. Who knows how far the club can go. We feel anything is possible."

"There is a brilliant mix here in terms of the squad. There are a lot of big signings that have been made but there are also plenty of lads who have come through the Academy and I think that is an important thing."

# Essien a stronger player

SOCCERNET

AFP, London

Ghana midfielder Michael Essien believes the trauma of missing most of last season with a serious knee injury has made him a stronger player.

Essien was sidelined for seven months after suffering a knee ligament tear but still managed to have a major influence on the team when he returned to action.

The 26-year-old helped Chelsea reach the Champions League semi-finals with superb displays against Juventus and Liverpool. He also featured as the Blues gave interim coach Guus Hiddink a winning send-off by beating Everton 2-1 in the FA Cup final.

With that up and down campaign behind him, Essien is convinced the experience has added an extra layer of steel to his personality.

"The injury has actually helped me a lot. I had to be strong to cope with the rehab and all the hard work. I have come back stronger than I was before," he told the London Evening Standard.

"After coming back from an injury like that I am now tougher mentally. You have to be in order to cope with it."

"I don't worry about the injury now because I'm the kind of person that when I'm on the pitch I forget about everything and just get on with my football."

"It was really tough to watch the games from the stands and seeing my team go through difficulties last season. I'm the type of person who wants to be on the pitch so that we win and lose together."

Essien is well established as a key member of Chelsea's squad but once again there is plenty of competition for places in new boss Carlo Ancelotti's team.

Frank Lampard, Michael Ballack, John Obi Mikel, Deco, Joe Cole, Florent Malouda and new signing Yuri Zhirkov are all battling with the Ghanaian to make the starting eleven, but Essien expects the competition to raise standards at the club even higher.

"I think we have one of the best midfields in the world," he said. "When you look at who we have you can see some good quality. We are strong now, but maybe we will be stronger in the future."

# MU overcome Boca

SOCCERNET

AFP, Seville

Antonio Valencia scored on his Manchester United debut as the Red Devils reached the final of the Audi Cup in Munich with a 2-1 win over Boca Juniors.

The Ecuadorian winger needed just 42 minutes of his United debut to find the target after Anderson had earlier netted his first goal for the club with a stunning free-kick.

Federico Insua reduced the arrears in the 55th minute as the Argentinians dominated the second half, but Sir Alex Ferguson's side held on to reach tomorrow's final, where they will meet the winner of the later clash between AC Milan and hosts Bayern Munich.

Ferguson named Federico Macheda and Wayne Rooney in his attack with Valencia making his debut on the right wing.

Much of the attention was on the Ecuadorian, who is earmarked to fill the void left by the sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to Real Madrid.

His first few touches exhibited a touch of nerves and it was Boca who made the more confident start to the game with Juan Roman Riquelme playing an intricate one-two with Insua before his shot was deflected wide of the post.

The sale of Ronaldo has not only provided Valencia with the opportunity to take his career onto the next level, but Anderson showed he too could benefit from a bit more of the limelight this season.

He curled an unstoppable free-kick from outside the right-hand corner of the penalty area into the far corner of Roberto Abbondanzieri's goal for his first ever goal for the Red Devils.

He was inevitably invited by the fans to shout the next time he received the ball 25 yards from goal, but his earlier strike had not quite given him the confidence to try his luck once again as

he instead laid the ball off to Wayne Rooney.

The sight of Wes Brown limping from the field with 10 minutes of the first half remaining dampened the spirits somewhat as Rio Ferdinand made an earlier than expected entrance into the game.

By this time, Rooney was fully warmed up and he led United's search for a second.

His first shot, a volley from fully 35 yards out, drew the approval from 61,000 fans inside the Allianz Arena, but it lacked the direction to trouble Abbondanzieri.

Rooney's persistence almost earned him United's second five minutes before the break. He had two bites of the cherry from Valencia's right-wing cross but was denied twice, first by a Boca defender and then by Abbondanzieri.

Valencia's early nerves had evaporated as he started to find his rhythm and it was not long before he opened his account for his new club.

He received the ball centrally from Rooney and, with a dip of the shoulder, he skipped past two Boca defenders before taking aim and releasing a shot from the edge of the area which squirmed under Abbondanzieri's body and in.

Boca emerged for the second half five minutes later than United, but they entered the field with a renewed determination.

Substitute Christian Chavez's curling shot tested Tomaz Kuszczak for the first time in the 52nd minute before Insua brought Alfio Basile's side back into the tie.

He volleyed in Gary Medel's right-wing cross as Boca began to stamp their authority on the game.

Riquelme curled a shot just wide before Craig Cathcart headed against his own crossbar as United began to show a degree of tiredness after their recent trip to the Far East.

Riquelme tested Kuszczak again with 15 minutes remaining and Pablo Mouche's effort just skimmed past the United goalkeeper's left-hand upright as Boca threatened an equaliser, but failed to find one.



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United's Brazilian midfielder Anderson celebrates scoring the opening goal against Boca Juniors during their friendly encounter in Munich on Wednesday.