

Writers choose Grafite as best

AFP, Berlin

Wolfsburg's Brazilian striker Grafite has been voted Germany's footballer of the year by the country's football writers and sports magazine Kicker.

The Brazilian earned 331 votes cast thanks to his 28 goals in 25 Bundesliga matches last season which contributed to his team winning the league title.

German international Mario Gomez, who transferred this summer to Bayern Munich from Stuttgart, came second with 171 votes, with Wolfsburg's Bosnian striker Edin Dzeko, voted player of the year by his peers in June, coming third with 169.

Wolfsburg manager Felix Magath earned the coach of the year award for the third time in his coaching career.

He first won in 2003 while in charge of Stuttgart before winning it again two years later after leading Bayern Munich to a league and cup double.

The 55-year-old achieved 778 votes with second-placed Markus Babbel of Stuttgart earning 65, and Hertha Berlin's Lucien Favre, who came third, achieving a mere 23.

Dzeko extends till 2013

INTERNET, undated

Edin Dzeko has extended his contract with VfL Wolfsburg by two years until 2013, the Bundesliga champions confirmed Saturday. "This is another positive signal for the future. Edin is an important part of our team," said Wolfsburg coach Armin Veh.

The 23-year-old Bosnia-Herzegovina striker, who netted 26 goals last season, said he was happy an agreement had been reached before the start of the new season.

"Now I can concentrate fully on Wolfsburg," he said. "I'm looking forward to the Bundesliga and the Champions League. We have high expectations at Wolfsburg."

Dzeko's scoring exploits had led to speculation that AC Milan were interested in signing the player.

Stuttgart rope in Pogrebniak

AFP, Stuttgart

Russian international Pavel Pogrebniak is poised for a move to Bundesliga club VfB Stuttgart, the German outfit said on Saturday.

The 25-year-old Zenit Saint Petersburg striker must first pass a medical on Monday with the transfer to be completed early next week.

He is set to sign a four-year deal with the club and fill the gap left by German international Mario Gomez, sold for 35 million euros to Bayern Munich.

Capped 13 times for the national side Pogrebniak joined Zenit in 2007, winning the UEFA Cup in 2008.

He comes Stuttgart's second recruit after Belarusian midfielder Alexander Hleb from Barcelona.

City lack respect, says Moyes

AFP, Liverpool

Everton boss David Moyes on Sunday accused Manchester City of showing a lack of respect to his team in their chase for Joleon Lescott.

Moyes, who has turned down two bids for the defender, does not like the way their cash-rich Premier League rivals have approached them.

"It's about showing respect and we're not being shown that," Moyes told the Sunday Mirror.

"I'm sure if I was (City boss) Mark Hughes, with all the money he has, I would try to buy the best players."

"But we try to go about it in a different fashion. I would think I would go about my business in the way I've always done."

City have had bids of 15 million pounds (25 million dollars) and 18 million pounds (30 million dollars) for Lescott turned down - and are now believed to be returning soon with a 22 million pound (37 million dollars) offer.

However, Everton are

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Arsenal star Andrei Arshavin (R) carries teammate Eduardo on his back after scoring his first goal against Atletico Madrid during their Emirates Cup clash at The Emirates Stadium in London on Saturday.

Carragher wary of Owen

Football

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher admitted Sunday he was wary of the threat posed by former teammate Michael Owen at Manchester United.

Carragher believes that United boss Sir Alex Ferguson could have pulled off a masterstroke in signing the 29-year-old striker who had an injury-plagued spell at relegated Newcastle.

"Signing Michael Owen was a clever piece of business by United and he has started really well in pre-season," Carragher told the Sunday

Mirror.

"In a way I'm pleased he's got a big move to a big club because he came in for a lot of criticism at Newcastle."

"Why? What did he do wrong up there?"

"For me, Michael Owen is still a great player and great role model and I have this feeling he'll be good for United."

"But he plays for our biggest rivals now so he'll know I won't want him to carry on scoring once the season starts."

He added: "He's scored a lot of goals in the first few games for United and I hope he scores a few more pre-season because I want him to do well."

"But as soon as the season

starts I hope he has a drought."

Despite his respect for Owen's talents, Carragher believes Liverpool's forward pairing of Fernando Torres and Steven Gerrard could not be bettered.

"No other team in England has a partnership like Gerrard and Torres. There is no better partnership in the world at the moment."

"It's strange to be talking about Stevie as a striker, but that's what he has become and, for me, in that position behind the main forward there is no one better."

"When he's playing alongside Torres they have the ability to tear defences wide open in a split second."

Milan rebuff Pirlo approach

AFP, Rome

AC Milan have turned down a seven-million pound (8.27 million euro) offer from Chelsea for Italian international midfielder Andrea Pirlo.

Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani said the bid from the English Premier League side, now coached by former Milan boss Carlo Ancelotti, was "unsatisfactory".

"The offer of seven million pounds plus Claudio Pizarro is not satisfactory... under these conditions Pirlo is not for sale," Galliani told Sky Sport Italia.

Toure leaves 'leaderless' Gunners

AFP, Manchester

Defender Kolo Toure insisted Sunday he made the right decision in swapping Arsenal for Manchester City because his former club have lost too many big names.

The Ivorian believes the failure to replace a host of star players has made the club a less attractive proposition than Mark Hughes' City.

The 28-year-old said: "I came to Man City because when you look at Arsenal you see all the great players have left the club and are now in the past."

"Look at what has happened there. Thierry Henry has gone, Patrick Vieira has gone, Ray Parlour has gone."

"These were the players that brought success to Arsenal and I believed it was right at this stage of my career to also move on."

"We lost too many leaders at Arsenal. When we were winning the league title the spirit was fantastic, we were like a band of brothers."

Toure also defended City's spending policy, which has seen them criticised in some quarters for distorting the market.

"The best teams are at the top only because they have the best players and to get those players you have to spend a lot of money," he said.

"You can't be successful in football without money. This is the football business. City have a project to build a big team and so it is natural it is going to cost money."

Arshavin hits brace

Football

AFP, London

Russian international Andrey Arshavin came off the bench to score twice as Arsenal beat Atletico Madrid 2-1 in the Emirates Cup on Saturday.

All three goals came in the last five minutes. Cesc Fabregas lofted the ball over to the back post from the right, where Arshavin arrived to volley past Sergio Asenjo.

However, German Pacheco then beat the offside trap to slot in an equaliser with just two minutes left.

In one final twist, Arshavin latched onto a poor backward clearing header from Tomas Ujfalusi to slot the ball in from the tightest of angles.

Arsenal welcomed back Czech winger Tomas Rosicky, who had been out of action for some 18 months with a string of nagging injuries, and his return was a welcome boost for manager Arsene Wenger following the loss of Samir Nasri to a broken leg.

The Spanish side, who started with former Gunner Jose Antonio Reyes in attack and were captained by ex-Manchester United forward Diego Forlan, could yet face Wenger's men again in competitive action next month in the Champions League play-off.

Arshavin, 28, arrived in England from Zenit St Petersburg during the January transfer win-

dow, but could not play in the Champions League.

He impressed in the latter half of the season and hit four goals against Liverpool at Anfield.

"The difference is now he knows how English football works," said Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger.

"He knows as well he is part of the team from the start, and the team knows how important and how big an impact he can have on the results."

"Arshavin has what you cannot give to a player - he understands when there is an opportunity in the final third, and is certainly dangerous."

Earlier, Rangers defeated Paris St Germain 1-0 thanks to a 75th-minute goal from defender Madjid Bougherra.

"I am pleased we did not concede a goal and I am happy with the performance," said Rangers boss Walter Smith.

"Our goalkeeper (Neil Alexander) did not have a great deal to do but you could also put that down to Paris St Germain not having the sharpness in front of goal."

Paris St Germain coach Antoine Kombouare was disappointed with his team's lacklustre showing.

"I am not happy because I don't like to lose," said Kombouare.

"The team was not really passionate and didn't show any aggression. They worked hard and we were good in our organisation. But we could not score any goals."

Spurs fall to shock loss

Football

AFP, Hong Kong

Two moments of magic from South China FC left English Premiership side Tottenham Hotspur reeling from a 2-0 loss in Hong Kong on Sunday.

A 25 yard half-volley from Chan Siu Ki and a penalty from skipper Li Haiqiang shocked the weary Spurs side.

South China started brightly and looked much sharper than their illustrious opponents, who appeared tired after their recent victory in the Barclays Asia Trophy over West Ham and Hull City.

South China hitman Chan

looked dangerous from the start and although he was outmuscled at times and was caught out with the offside flag too often, he did at least bring some urgency to an uneventful first half.

He had a couple of efforts on goal but nothing to trouble Carlo Cudicini.

At the other end Spurs' Scottish defender Alan Hutton nearly succeeded after a neat one-two with Roman Pavlyuchenko.

The Russian had a few shots on goal but Zhang Chunhui was equal to all the striker could throw at him.

After the break the home side upped the ante and not even the introduction of

Robbie Keane, Jermain Defoe and Aaron Lennon could inject any pace into the Spurs attack.

Chan picked up a loose ball seven minutes after the interval and fired an unstoppable shot into the net over Heurleho Gomez, who had replaced Carlo Cudicini.

The game was sealed at 69 minutes when referee NG Chiu Kok controversially ruled Chao Peng Fei had been brought down in the box.

Skipper Li knocked the ball in from the penalty spot after Gomez went the wrong way to complete a fantastic result for South China in front of a 23,000-strong at Hong Kong Stadium.

Becks scores in Barca loss

Football

AFP, Los Angeles

David Beckham says after two clashes with abusive football fans just days apart, he's ready to turn the other cheek and walk away if it happens again.

"He insulted my wife," Beckham said of a spectator at recent MLS game in Kansas City. "If you insult my family members I am going to stick up for my wife and family."

"But if it happens again I wouldn't even look at him. It is not worth the time and energy."

Beckham was speaking following the Galaxy's 2-1 international friendly loss to FC Barcelona in front of a crowd of 93,137 at the Rose Bowl stadium. It was the largest crowd to watch a football match in America in 15 years since the United States hosted the World Cup.

The booing of Beckham by Los Angeles Galaxy fans continued at Saturday's match as large sections of the sold out crowd jeered him from the opening introduction.

They continued in the

second half despite his strong play and Beckham having scored the lone goal for the Galaxy against the Spanish powerhouse Barcelona.

Beckham has incurred the wrath of Galaxy fans who feel he is overpaid and don't like his sidetrips to Europe to play for other teams.

Beckham downplayed the booing on Saturday, saying just a small percentage of the fans at the Rose Bowl were making most of the noise.

Said Beckham, "Quite a few are still reacting the way they react. But out of 93,000 people you have 95 or 97 percent who are incredible. Then you have the odd minority but that is life."

Forward Jeffren Suarez scored the winner in the 67th minute for Barcelona which dominated throughout the game but had trouble converting their chances.

Midfielder Pedro Rodriguez scored in the 11th minute, picking up a Lionel Messi rebound to give Barcelona a 1-0 lead.

Messi did the lion's share of the work on the play, breaking loose in close and getting two shots on net before Rodriguez tucked in the rebound with Galaxy

netminder Donovan Ricketts out of position.

Beckham's goal on a free kick just before half pulled the Galaxy even at 1-1.

"I hit the sweet spot. When you know it is going in, it's a good feeling," Beckham said.

The boos continued in the second half but by then the pro-Beckham side at the Rose Bowl had started to make their voices heard. Beckham came out of the game in 87th minute to mixture of boos and cheers.

Despite the run ins with American fans and the difficulty of travelling back and forth between continents, Beckham said Saturday he would return to the Galaxy for another season.

"I am contracted to the Galaxy and the MLS and I will be here next year," he said.

This is not the first time Beckham had drawn the wrath of football fans. After England's 1998 World Cup elimination game, he was blasted after receiving a red card in the second round loss to Argentina.

"Back in 1998 it was 100 times worse and it affected me 100 times worse. This is nothing," Beckham said.

Ribery the diva

Football

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's French star Franck Ribery is injured and will miss his team's start in the new Bundesliga season, the home fixture on August 8 at the Allianz Arena against Hoffenheim.

Currently the man fans once hailed as "Kaiser Franck" is looking far from imperial and

trated, making it clear the asking fee set by Bayern was over the top.

Outspoken Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer blasted Ribery for, in his view, being more interested in his own career than the club and suggested that the player could still be sold - for 94 million euros.

"Of course we would expect the market price, and if Cristiano Ronaldo is worth 94 million, then Ribery is worth a

As another season in Germany looms, Ribery's attitude continues to make headlines. When the team assembled for the official pre-season photo session, observers noted the Frenchman was unsmiling and distant.

He may have been wishing he was at a different stadium - namely the Bernabeu in Madrid, hob-nobbing with Ronaldo, Kaka and Karim Benzema as Real Madrid chairman Florentino Perez proudly showed off his multi-million euro signings in the Spanish sun.

New Munich manager Louis Van Gaal made it clear the France international would play for no more than 20 minutes in the first game of the season because of the tendonitis he has in his knee.

The ex-Marseille player was ruled out of the team for the pre-season Audi Cup tournament involving Manchester United, AC Milan and Boca Juniors.

The player currently tagged "the Bavarian Diva" by German media has missed all the side preparation matches since training resumed at Bayern Munich's Black Forest camp in July.

His condition poses a problem for France manager Raymond Domenech, preparing his side for the country's next World Cup qualifying match against the Faroe Islands on August 12.

Although the usually hyperactive midfielder may not be an essential part of the line-up to play the islanders, he will be called upon to perform in the ensuing ties against Romania and Serbia in September.



FRANCK RIBERY

the additional recuperation period may give the 26-year-old midfielder time to carry out some public relations to polish up his image.

The France international's commitment to the mighty south German club has been looking very tarnished after a summer-long sequence of speculation about a possible move to Real Madrid, to Barcelona or even to Manchester United.

In the end the big-spending Spanish club went away frus-

comparable sum. But if no offer is forthcoming he must fulfil the terms of his contract until 2011," he told Sport Bild newspaper.

Commentators were not entirely convinced by a statement from Bayern management which said: "Bayern have at no time had and do not have the impression from Franck Ribery that he would only use Bayern in order to further his own career. He has always given himself and his abilities to the service of the team."



LA Galaxy midfielder David Beckham hits a stunning free-kick to score in their friendly match against Barcelona at the Home Depot Stadium in Los Angeles on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP