

Schumi racing against time

INTERNET, undated



Michael Schumacher's planned comeback to Formula One for this month's European Grand Prix in Valencia is putting pressure on his doctors to ensure the Ferrari driver is fit enough to deal with the rigours of the sport. "It's an exceptional situation for us because nobody had planned with preparing such an intensive training programme," Dr Johannes Peil, whose team at the Bad Neuenahr sports clinic has treated Schumacher for the last nine years, told German Press Agency dpa.

Normally a driver has months to get in shape but the 40-year-old Schumacher only has three weeks until the race in Valencia on August 23, when he will replace the injured Felipe Massa in the Ferrari cockpit.

"We have an emergency programme in place until Valencia, after which time a standard one will come into operation. Everything is important but we only have a limited time to complete everything," he said.

"It's only because Michael has done so much in his sport since he retired is a return even possible. Even after a break of three or four weeks, a Formula One driver needs some time to adapt correctly to the extreme pressures.

"It affects the spinal chord as well as the lower

arms and hands. No training is a substitute for the experience of driving in a racing car."

Schumacher's fitness programme involves up to four physiotherapy sessions a day as well as endurance and other exercises designed specifically for F1 drivers.

"We will be working with two physiotherapists over the next two or three weeks to ensure we can achieve all our tasks," said Peil.

While Schumacher is well-known as a fitness fanatic, Peil said there would be no chance that the seven-time world champion could overdo his preparations this time around.

"We won't have to hold him back this time as the challenges are so numerous and the time so short," said Peil, who added that he noticed Schumacher's huge desire to make this comeback a success.

"It gives us hope that we will achieve the results we need in order for him to race. He wants to make it, Schumacher's complete professionalism stands behind this preparation."

Peil refused to comment specifically on the neck injury Schumacher picked up in February when he fell off a motorbike, saying only that "all injuries" a driver has picked up in his career would have to be taken into account.

"We try our best to balance things accordingly. But we will only know if he can drive when all the tests have been concluded," said Peil.



Bayern Munich striker Mario Gomez (L) is about to score the opening goal against Neckarelz during their German Cup clash in Sinsheim on Sunday.

Hanover suffer early exit

AFP, Berlin

Top flight Hanover suffered an embarrassing early exit from the German Cup on Sunday, losing 3-1 at fourth division Trier in their first round meeting.

Joining Trier, coached by former German international Mario Basler, in the next round were fellow fourth tier outfit Lubeck, who saw off promoted Mainz 2-1 after extra-time on Friday.

The other big guns came through unscathed as new Bayern Munich coach Louis van Gaal saw his men see off sixth division amateurs Neckarelz 3-1 despite striker Mario Gomez missing a hatful of chances.

But the Germany international finally broke the deadlock on 51 minutes and then added a penalty six minutes later and although an error from Bayern keeper Michael Rensing gifted the hosts a consolation, Hamit Altintop made the 14-times Cup winners breathe more easily with the third.

"We were up against a well-organised side - we were running around a bit aimlessly in the first half," admitted Van Gaal.

Elsewhere, holders Werder Bremen swamped Union Berlin 5-0 on Sunday while, on Saturday, Stuttgart rattled off a 4-1 win at part-timers Grossaspach and league champions Wolfsburg beat third division Wiesbaden 4-1 on Friday.

Dusseldorf host Hamburg on Monday.

Bent close to Sunderland move

AFP, London

Tottenham striker Darren Bent is on the verge of signing for Sunderland after undergoing a medical with the Premier League club.

The Black Cats initially moved for Bent more than a week ago, but the deal seemed to have stalled as Spurs chairman Daniel Levy held out for a 16 million pounds fee.

Bent revealed his frustration at the delay by posting angry comments on the Twitter website and was later forced to apologise.

But the England forward appears to have got his wish at last after he flew to the Stadium of Light on Monday after the two clubs agreed a fee believed to be around 14 million pounds.

Wenger calms Wilshire hype

AFP, London

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger attempted to put a lid on the growing hype surrounding teenage striker Jack Wilshire after the 17-year-old produced a sensational display against Rangers.

Wilshire scored the opening goal in the 3-0 win over the Scottish champions which gave the Londoners the Emirates Cup and was a danger all afternoon, a timely display in front of watching England coach Fabio Capello.

"I don't know how much he will play this season. It is very difficult to predict," said Wenger of the youth team star.

"The only problem in England, knowing the impatience of English people, is that it will be difficult to keep the right pace in his progress.

"Let's be calm and quiet. There is still a year to go to the World Cup, and let's see how he improves, how he is consistent.

"Let's not make stars in just two games. You have to respect the development of the players."

With the new English Premier League season starting on August 15, Wenger said he still wants to further strengthen a squad which has lost both Emmanuel Adebayor and Kolo Toure to Manchester City.

"I will now think about the whole squad," said the Wenger. "Two weeks ago, I didn't know if we would have Eduardo or not, or Tomas Rosicky back.

"They both look to be completely back, so that makes the squad quite big."

Wilshire fires Gunners

Football

AFP, London

Teen star Jack Wilshire bagged a brace of goals Sunday as Arsenal saw off Scottish champions Rangers 3-0 to lift the Emirates Cup.

The 17-year-old scored the opener after just two minutes and the "baby gunner" repeated the dose after Croatian international Eduardo had netted the second in the 11th minute.

Earlier, Atletico Madrid and Paris St Germain, beaten by Rangers the previous day, parted 1-1 with Maradona's son-in-law Sergio Agüero netting for the Spaniards from the spot four minutes before the break after he was fouled by Albert Baning before Ludovic Giuly levelled on 71 minutes.

Not such good news for coach Arsene Wenger was having to withdraw French veteran William Gallas at the break after he took a knock to his right knee.

Manuel Almunia appeared back in goal for Arsenal, replacing Vito Mannone, while

Rangers fielded Steven Naismith, who once had a trial at Arsenal.

Another fledgling Gunner to catch the eye was Fran Merida, once on Barcelona's books and who adroitly set up Eduardo's goal.

Rangers had an early chance when Nacho Novo broke down the right, crossing towards Naismith, with Alex Song making an important block on the loose ball at the far post.

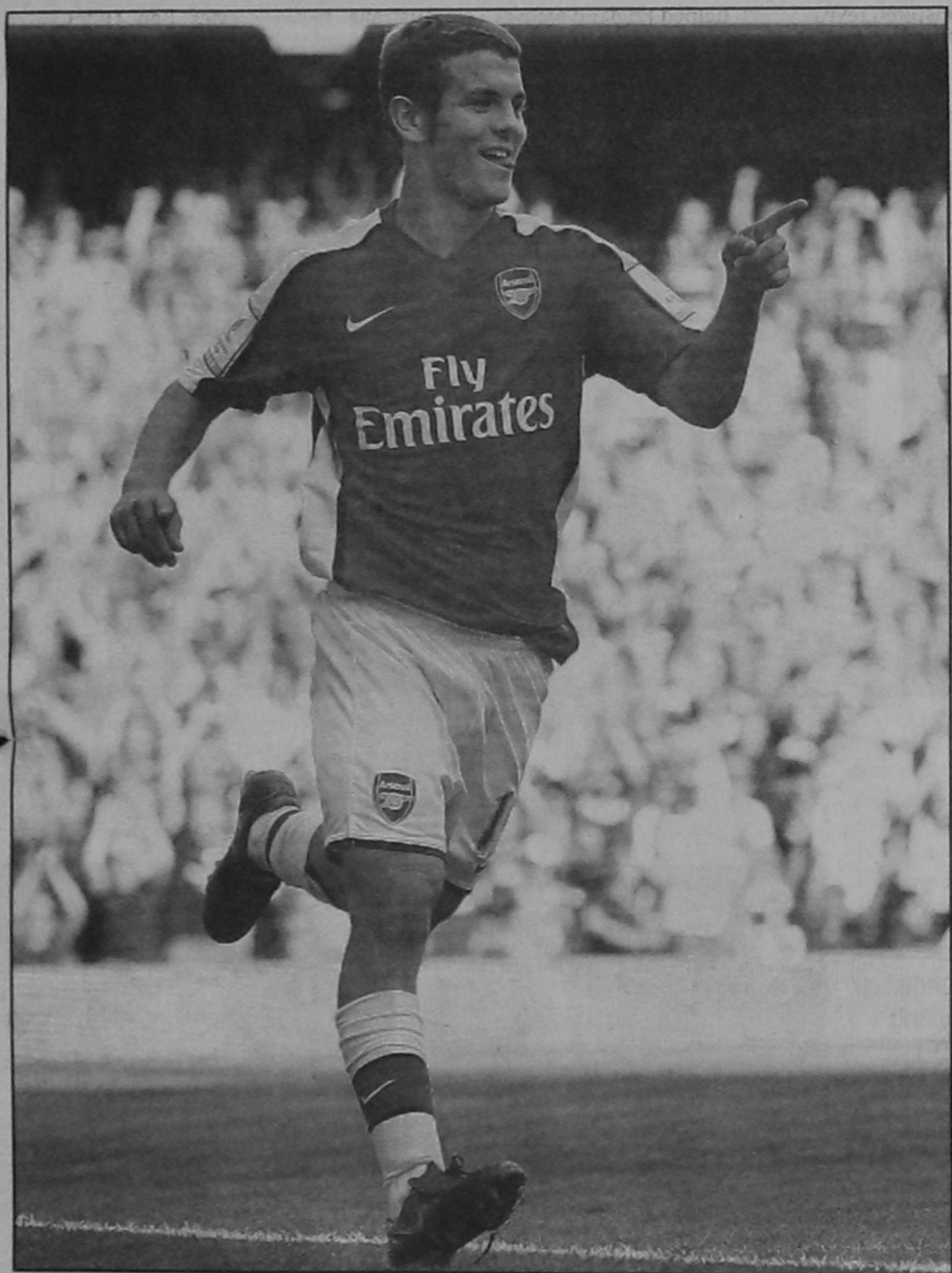
At the other end, Andrey Arshavin was just off target following good work from Spanish star Cesc Fabregas.

Arsenal rang the changes on the hour with the two early goals having effectively ended the contest with Arshavin giving way to Nicklas Bendtner while FA Youth Cup winner Sanchez Watt replaced Eduardo.

Wales midfielder Aaron Ramsey then replaced Merida.

Watt and Ramsay then combined to find Wilshire at the far post for his clincher.

Fit-again Czech Tomas Rosicky replaced Fabregas in the closing stages as Arsenal cruised to victory.



Arsenal starlet Jack Wilshire celebrates scoring the third goal against Rangers during their Emirates Cup encounter at the Emirates Stadium on Sunday.

MU deny stealing Pogba

Football

AFP, Manchester

Premier League champions Manchester United have dismissed claims they stole 16-year-old midfielder Paul Pogba from French club Le Havre.

United have been accused of offering very large sums to the parents of the teenager, who has captained the national team at under-16 level, to induce him to end a contract he has until the end of this season.

In an angry statement Le Havre said: "This act is even more unacceptable as it comes from a club with such stature."

But a United spokesman told BBC Sport: "It is complete nonsense. Everything has been done within UEFA guidelines."

Le Havre, who were relegated to the French second division last season, claim an agreement between the club, Pogba and his parents was in place for the player to stay until the end

of the 2009/2010 season.

A statement - under the heading 'Manchester United steal Paul Pogba from HAC (Le Havre)' - on the club's website said: "Le Havre wishes to express its indignation regarding the dealings of Manchester United's directors in relation to the young Paul Pogba."

"The player and his parents refused to keep the arrangement because Manchester United offered very high sums of money to the parents of the (player) with the aim of obtaining the transfer of their son."

"At a time when numerous parties - including at European Union level, governmental (level), or within FIFA or UEFA - are speaking out against the 'trading of minors,' Manchester United does not hesitate to uproot a 16-year-old kid."

Players from European Union countries are able to move to Britain on academy or scholarship contracts at 16, and to sign full professional contracts at 17.

By signing a player under the age of 18, the buying club minimises the level of compensation the selling club will get.

L'pool, Real in Xabi talks

AFP, Madrid

Liverpool and Real Madrid are still negotiating the possible transfer of midfielder Xabi Alonso to the big-spending Spanish club, the Spanish press reported Monday.

Officials of both clubs -- Jose Angel Sanchez for Real and Christian Purslow for Liverpool -- met Sunday in Barcelona to discuss the move, according to sports newspapers AS and Marca.

AS said Real has offered 30 million euros for the Spain international, an amount it said was about five million less than that sought by Liverpool.

Marca said Liverpool is seeking 40 million for the 27-year-old -- 35 million plus five more based on results.

But it said if negotiations break down Real is ready to target Belgian Steven Defour of Standard Liege instead.

Xabi Alonso told AS he "wants the situation resolved soon, one way or another."

Liverpool officials were in Barcelona for a friendly match against Espanyol on Sunday, which the English side lost 3-0.

Real have spent over 200 million euros on new players in the close season, including Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema and Kaka.

Marca said the Spanish giants have also reached a deal to offload Dutch midfielder Wesley Sneijder to Inter Milan for 18 million euros.

Terry won't influence Ancelotti

AFP, London

Chelsea captain John Terry insists he won't use his influence at Stamford Bridge to pressure new boss Carlo Ancelotti into making big-money buys.

Recent reports suggested Terry demanded assurances that Chelsea were still committed to signing high-profile players before he decided to spurn Manchester City's advances last month.

The England defender was persuaded to stay after talks with Blues owner Roman Abramovich, after which Terry spoke of his relationship with the Russian in glowing terms.

But Terry was quick to play down talk that he was pressuring Abramovich and Ancelotti to sign the likes of AC Milan midfielder Andrea Pirlo.

"I want to clear something up. I'm a player and it's the manager and board who make those decisions," Terry told the Daily Mirror.

"The only thing I spoke about with the club was it was important people like Didier Drogba and Ashley Cole, whose contracts are up now, stay with us."

"It was important to me that we build around the current squad and it was right for them to stay."

"Now people are saying I'm asking for Andrea Pirlo to be signed and I'm asking for this player or that player to be signed. I promise you I never get involved in any players brought in or going."

"What I know 100 per cent is I'm a player and I want to concentrate on that and leave it to the manager and board to make the signings."

Villa stun Juventus

Football

AFP, Seville

Aston Villa overcame Italian giants Juventus to win the Peace Cup on penalties on Sunday after both sides had failed to score at the end of extra time.

The Italians, who beat Real Madrid 2-1 in Friday's semi-final, put Martin O'Neill's up-and-coming team under intense pressure in a fast-paced game, played in the southern Spanish city of Seville, in which both sides failed to convert a host of chances.

In the end, Carlos Cuellar scored for Villa while Nicola Legrottaglie missed the last spot-kick to give the English Premier League side a 4-3 win on penalties.

Villa keeper Brad Guzan stopped a lame shot from Italian legend Alessandro del Piero and also saved from Vincenzo Iaquinta while Steve Sidwell and Chris Herd failed to score their penalties for Villa.

The Premier League side were without England striker Emile Heskey who was suspended after picking up a red card in the 2-1 semi-final win over Porto.

Juve, who finished runners-up to Inter Milan in Serie A last season, started the game with veterans Del Piero and Fabio Cannavaro

on the bench.

The teams were evenly matched in the first half.

Villa looked dangerous on the break, with Ashley Young and Norwegian John Carew forcing saves from Gianluigi Buffon, while Mauro Camoranesi looked impressive for Juventus.

The best chance came from 19-year-old Villa midfielder Marc Albrighton, who found space on the right in the 41st minute and hit a powerful low shot that was blocked by the Italian keeper.

Juventus stepped up the pace in the second half, but could not find a way past American keeper Guzan.

David Trezequet in particular missed what appeared to be an easy chance for Juventus when he blasted over the bar in the 63rd minute from close range.

The French international also had an overhead kick saved by Guzan in the first half of extra time.

Twelve clubs took part in the prestigious pre-season Peace Cup tournament.

The tournament began life in 2003 and FIFA recognised it as an international event in 2007, when it was won by French side Lyon.

This year is the first time it has been held outside of South Korea.



Aston Villa players are ecstatic after winning against Juventus in the tie-breaker during the Peace Cup final at the Olympic Stadium in Seville on Sunday.

Harry eyes top four

AFP, Hong Kong



Spurs boss Harry Redknapp insists his side can break into the Premier League's top four this season but admits it will be tougher than ever with mega-bucks Manchester City an added threat.

Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal have monopolised the top four places in the league for the past four seasons -- and with it the lucrative Champions League qualification berths.

Redknapp has tipped Manchester City, bankrolled by their Abu Dhabi billionaire owners, to make a major impact this season but is confident that with a few additions to his squad, Spurs can be challengers.

The boss of the North London side, who is eyeing Newcastle United defender Sebastien Bassong, saw his side lose 2-0 Sunday to Hong Kong side South China to

round off their summer tour of Asia.

But Redknapp, who transformed a struggling Spurs when he took over last season, only just missing out on a place in the Europa League, says his squad has the quality to finish in the top four.

"We will try. It's going to be really difficult with the big four. You are going to have Man City. It will be a shock if they don't get in the top four," Redknapp said.

"Certainly, we have good enough players and we'll give it a good go. We are still looking to bring in a few players to improve the squad. I still feel we need one or two players to make us stronger, we should have a good chance." "Bassong is a good player who I like but as far as I know the chairman hasn't made an offer," he added.

He said a deal was close for Darren Bent to move to Sunderland "but we have been close to doing a deal for the last two weeks."

The England striker was forced to apologise last week

after using Internet networking site Twitter to blast Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy for failing to rubber-stamp his proposed move.

Redknapp said the Asian tour, during which Spurs beat Hull City in Beijing, to lift the Barclays Asia Trophy, had been tough and some players were now heading away on international duty.

"I don't know if the South China game was a game too far, because I changed it around a bit and gave the young lads a game. I fielded our strongest team in China and full credit to the opposition."

Spurs' Jermaine Jenas said the Hong Kong heat was the perfect preparation for the tough season ahead.

"It was a tough game and we have a lot to learn from it. The important thing is we get a rhythm as the season is creeping up on us now. It's important the lads get their fitness right as the Premiership is a very intense league and playing in weather like that is going to improve our fitness."