## Rooney targets 25

Football

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Wayne Rooney is aiming to fill the void left by Cristiano Ronaldo by scoring 25 goals for Manchester United this season.

Sir Alex Ferguson has promised to hand would still have that. Rooney a more central striking role for the champions after Ronaldo made the switch to Real Madrid.

The England man was regularly dispatched to the flanks to accommodate the Portuguese last season but still notched 20 goals for United.

And Rooney is convinced he can better that in 2009/10. "Of course 25 is a target which I hope I'm going to reach," said Rooney. "I've always said I should score more and hopefully I'll do that this season.

"I've got what I wanted. I like to play through the middle. The manager has come out now and said I am going to play there throughout

the season so I'm delighted with that. He may change his mind and whatever he says goes, but I hope he will play me there for most of the season. If I keep scoring goals I will justify it."

He added: "I am comfortable with the extra responsibility now Cristiano has gone. There have been big expectations on me for the last seven years so whether he was here or not I

"But I have never looked at myself as being the main man. It is a team game, I won't win a trophy on my own."

Rooney has also backed strike partner Dimitar Berbatov to shine after he had a quiet first season at Old Trafford: "You can see in training and games during pre-season that Dimitar has looked sharper," said Rooney.

"He looks like he is more determined. He is tracking back with the full-backs in preseason and is definitely working harder and trying to impress. He is a brilliant player. He has so much quality he has got and we all want him to show it."

### 'Masche not for sale'

Football

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be on show this season.

With Cristiano Ronaldo

now settled in at Real Madrid

and Carlos Tevez moving down

the road to Manchester City, Sir

Alex Ferguson has had a bit of

the outcome is an orthodox 4-

4-2 formation that he believes

will be good enough to terror-

And, according to Fletcher,

"We have always been tight

at the back because we have a

maybe we have been a little bit

"The ethos of the club is

too expansive at times," he said.

adjusting to do this summer.

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez insists Javier Mascherano is now fully focused on the Reds after having his head turned by Barcelona this summer.

The Spanish giants have been constantly linked with a swoop for the Argentina midfielder but Benitez has told Mascherano he is going nowhere.

Liverpool sold Xabi Alonso to Real Madrid for £30m last

Fletcher has

predicted a

more rigid

week and Benitez is keen not to lose two star players in the same transfer window.

"Javier knows he is staying," the Liverpool boss said. "He has accepted his future is here and that he is going to be a key player for us once more.

Mascherano is now fully focused on us and what we might achieve together this season, I can guarantee that

"We've spoken about his situation before and we spoke again. Before, it was difficult and he could see Xabi Alonso was on his way.

cant improvement in his game he is playing much better."

"You also have to be disci-

plined and I think you are going

At Wembley on Sunday,

Maybe it should not have

to see a more rigid 4-4-2 forma-

Fletcher was right at the heart

Michael Carrick in the centre of

been a surprise. For, as the

close season dragged on, so

Fletcher's abilities grew as

reasons for United's lamenta-

ble Champions League final

to draw was that United were

passed to death by Barcelona

because Fletcher was sus-

pended for the Rome show-

down, consigned there due to

up when the semi-final at

Arsenal was already won.

The inescapable conclusion

display were unearthed.

Defence key to MU

tion this season.

Manchester of that formation, partnering

midfield.

ise opposition at home and duo Andres Iniesta and Xavi

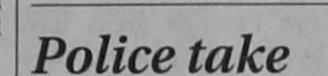
great defensive record but the needless red card he picked

about attacking football. let the adulation go to his head.

over the past 10 days. He has been a lot more focused, and we are seeing the real Mascherano again."

Mascherano's performances since return from international duty have been below par, but Benitez is confident his performance in the 2-1 pre-season defeat to Atletico Madrid on Saturday shows he will once again be a key player this season.

"He played much better against Atletico than he has before," added Benitez. "I am confident he is more focused now. The last week has "There has been a signifi- changed the situation a lot and



feel I made a big step forward

desperate to be out there." Undeniably, last season's

consistent. The 25-year-old made 42 appearances last term and the vast majority of his contributions were telling ones in a season that ended with a third Premier League title if not a place in Rome.

"There are some great midfielders at the club but I managed to get into the team for the start of the season and stay there for most of it," he Not that Fletcher is about to

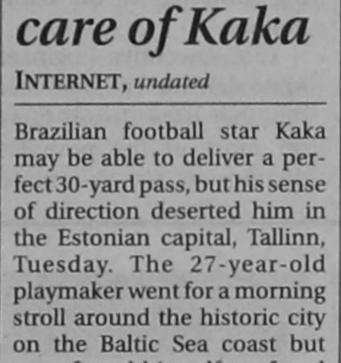
nuity of playing most weeks.

United missed me in Rome," he "It is nice to hear and I did

last season. "But sometimes you become a better player by not playing. People notice you because you are not there. It is easy to sit in the stand. I was

was Fletcher's best and most

"My performances improved because of the conti-



soon found himself confused by the cobbled streets and winding lanes of the medieval Old Town, police said. Estonian police confirmed that they found Kaka and a

masseur from the training staff wandering near Tallinn's ferry terminal, where boats leave frequently to Helsinki, 80 kilometres away across the Gulf of Finland.

As the group was having some trouble deciding how to get back to the team hotel, police obliged by giving them a lift in exchange for an auto-

Speaking to reporters, Kaka said he had simply been exploring.

"It is my first time here and I am pleased to know another city and another country. This morning I went for a walk to the port to see some things,' he said.

Brazilian web portal Folha Online quoted Kaka as saying that Tallinn is "very beautiful."

"I even got to ride in a police car for the first time in my life," Kaka said.

Estonia hosts Brazil for a friendly match Wednesday evening.

#### Roma reject De Rossi bid

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AS Roma have rejected a bigmoney offer from Chelsea for midfielder Daniele De Rossi, according to the Italian club.

Giallorossi official Bruno Conti claims Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti made an approach for the Italy international as he scoured his homeland for players who could improve his squad in the Premier League.

"I've personally had a call from Ancelotti to take the player to Chelsea. But Daniele is untouchable," Conti told Radio Radio. "The offer was of a lot of money, but it has been refused."

Roma president Rosella Sensi has also moved to distance the club from any suggestion that they would be prepared to part with the 26year-old.

"De Rossi isn't and won't be for sale. He remains with us", she said.

But Roma sold Alberto Aquilani to Liverpool for £20m earlier this month and the club's transfer chief Daniele Prade has not ruled out further departures.

He said: "Will there be other sales? We care about this club and if there will be important offers then yes, there could be more sales. The financial balance is important and if necessary we will bring in more money."

"Chelsea wanted [Daniele] De Rossi, but we turned down their offer," Prade concluded.



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Manchester City boss expects to be without Roque Santa Cruz until the

Wolfsburg's new signing Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins poses during his presentation in Wolfsburg on Wednesday.

end of August. Hughes spent £17m to lure the Paraguayan down the M61 from Blackburn, but was

already aware his City debut would be put on hold due to knee surgery. With Emmanuel Adebayor having since been recruited from Arsenal, Hughes has no

need to push the 27-year-old back into action too soon. And the City chief intends to let Santa Cruz recover at his own pace in the hope his side

will gain long-term benefits. "We knew Roque would have a period of rehabilita-

we have good options up front," Hughes told transfer request yesterday, www.mcfc.co.uk. If we can, we want to give

him the time he really needs, rather than getting him back early and having him at 70%. Rather than bring him

back too soon. I would rather give him the time that he sale.' needs. We are hoping by the end of the month he will be available."

With just three days to go before his new-look side visit Blackburn, it promises to be a busy time for Hughes.

It is expected City will lodge another bid for Joleon Lescott, although Everton are giving no sign of being interested in doing a deal, even if after suffering a minor setback the Eastlands outfit increase in his recovery from an their most recent £18million

Toffees boss David Moyes season.

response to Lescott's official and the Scot is showing no sign of softening his stance.

"I have said all along that I have no intention of selling my best players," he told www.evertonfc.com.

Joleon is simply not for

It means Hughes will almost certainly have to utilise his present squad at Ewood Park, although, like Santa Cruz, neither Vincent Kompany nor Michael Johnson will be involved.

Kompany underwent a toe operation last month, while up to my agents. The talks are Johnson is still two weeks being conducted on a daily away from a return to action basis and I think that everyabdominal complaint that ruled him out for most of last

thing will soon be finished. "All in all, there's a bid possibility that I'll become a Chelsea player in the next few days," he said.

poised for

Premier League giants

Chelsea are poised to sign

talented Serbian youngster

Nemanja Matic from

Slovakian club Kosice within

days, the player said in a report

interested about seeing me in

their ranks this summer," the

20-year-old midfielder was

quoted as telling the Serbian

"The London club are very

"I've left the whole matter

Chelsea

AFP, Belgrade

hereWednesday.

daily Press.

PHOTO: AFP

Matic, who has represented Serbia at the youth level, added that other clubs including Middlesbrough had been keen on signing him but that Chelsea was the most

attractive option. "It's important that my club Kosice, where I won recognition as a player, is satisfied," the 20-year-old told

"I have a contract with them for another one-and-ahalfyears and I hope that it will end in the best possible way."

#### Spurs wait on Woodgate

AFP, London

Tottenham centre-back Jonathan Woodgate is back at the London club to start his recovery programme after groin surgery in Germany.

"Jonathan Woodgate underwent minor surgery on the groin problem that has prevented his participation in our pre-season preparations," a statement from Spurs read on

Tuesday. "Jonathan will now begin a rehabilitation programme with our physios."

Tottenham have set the former Real Madrid player specific targets to achieve before moving on to his next stage of recovery, meaning they are not putting a time frame on his return at this point.

Manager Harry Redknapp is short on cover at the back because Michael Dawson is also out, with an Achilles injury.

Ledley King should be able to face Liverpool on Sunday in the first weekend of the Premier League but is unable to play matches in quick suc-

Sebastien Bassong has been brought in from Newcastle to

bolster the defence. Redknapp has plenty of options in attack, however with Peter Crouch, Jermain Defoe, Robbie Keane and

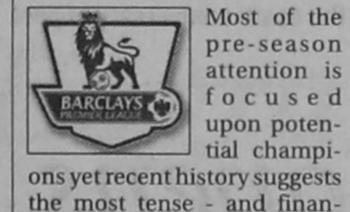
Roman Pavlyuchenko fighting

'I've played with Roman, Robbie and Jermain in training - and they are all fantastic players," said Crouch.

for two places.

'We've four strikers battling it out for two spots. That is healthy competition and has to be good for the club."





upon potential champi-

the most tense - and financially damaging - competition will be at the other end of the Premier League table. Around 40 million pounds

is the estimated cost of relegation for the three clubs who finish at the foot of the standings and this season, as in most, the three promoted sides are also hotly-tipped to return directly to The Championship.

Wolves, as champions, Birmingham City and play-off winners Burnley are the clubs who graduated to England's top-flight and all face a monumental task in consolidating their new found status.

A key factor in being able to stave off a swift relegation is the calibre of players recruited by a newly-promoted club and, consequently, Wolves and Birmingham will perhaps feel more confident than Burnley, even though all three have broken their transfer records this close season.

Wolves have brought in players such as the experienced forward Kevin Doyle, a record 6.5 million capture from Reading, as well as midfielder Nenad Milijas from, Red Star Belgrade and goalkeeper Marcus Hahnemann, also from Reading.

It is the combination of experience and new-found enthusiasm that is so often the key factor in a side managing to stay up, as Hull City proved with their impressive opening to the campaign 12 months

Equally, Birmingham have so far recruited eight new players, which is firstly a tacit admission that their venture.

Attracting players such as Lee Bowyer, Joe Hart, on loan from Manchester City, former Scotland captain Barry Ferguson and nine million signing Christian Benitez will all significantly strengthen the west midlands club and they will be quietly confident they can avoid the fate of relegation, which they endured in May 2008.

Burnley have spent significantly less than their promotion partners, primarily because more money simply does not exist. Manager Owen Coyle has

wages, with the three million invested in Hibernian winger Steven Fletcher his largest investment. As a result, the Lancashire club has an almighty mountain to climb, not that Coyle

admitted he has just 16 million

to spend on both transfers and

himself is too concerned. "In terms of Premier League salaries, we will be the lowest payers, but equally, they will still be good salaries in life, so players have to be

aware of that," he said. "We were one of the smaller clubs in terms of finance in the Championship, so small fry does not even sum it up when it comes to talking about the magnitude of the Premier League."

However, it is not all gloom for the new sides.

All three will take huge spirit from the fact that last season, two of the promoted teams - Stoke City and Hull both managed to keep a foothold in the Premier League while two supposedly more established clubs did not, in the forms of Newcastle United and Middlesbrough.

ites for the drop, underlining how much predicting survival is an inexact science. This year, Bolton Wanderers, whose manager Gary Megson can still not win

the fans over, could be a strong candidate. Portsmouth are racked by financial troubles and an unhappy squad which could also be an issue and both Stoke and, especially given

their second half to last sea-

son, Hull will again face seri-

ously challenging seasons as

they look to survive.

Wigan Athletic could be an outside choice to struggle as they head into the season with a new manager, Roberto Martinez, who has never managed at this level while West Ham and Fulham will only feel comfortable once safety is a mathematical certainty.

Paul Jewell is one of the game's most experienced managers in life at this end of the table, having steered Bradford and Wigan to safety and taken Derby County down into the Championship in his He has no doubt that it will

be a major surprise if, as has happened only once before in Premier League history, all three newcomers survive.

"When you have spent a while in the Championship, operating on simple budgets with no big benefactor, making that leap into the Premier League is massive and you don't have to be a genius to work out why new clubs fail,'

said Jewell. "It is luck if one survives, incredibly unusual if two do and it will be a miracle if all three make it.



the Cornella-El Prat Stadium in Barcelona on Tuesday.

# Espanyol midfielder Francisco Javier Rufete holds a bouquet during teammate Dani Jarque's vigil at