

Milan lift Trofeo Berlusconi

Football

INTERNET, undated

Milan finally had something to smile about in pre-season after beating Juventus on penalties in the Trofeo Luigi Berlusconi.

Faultless from the spot, the Rossoneri sealed victory on Monday evening after coming from behind to grab a deserved 1-1 draw in the 90 minutes.

Milan had the better of the first half and went close on 19 minutes to taking the lead through Andrea Pirlo.

The midfielder picked up the ball after a poor Felipe Melo clearance and rattled the bar with his effort from outside the box.

Juventus, after Milan had been denied a penalty for what seemed like handball, took the lead through Diego on 28 minutes.

The new signing from Werder Bremen looked dangerous throughout after returning from injury and his angled drive was helped in by a Thiago Silva deflection.

Milan ended the first period with another chance, but Klaas-Jan Huntelaar's effort was comfortably dealt with by Gigi Buffon.

Juventus brought on Amauri for Vincenzo Iaquinta at the interval and the Brazilian gave the Old Lady a little more direction in attack.

Diego was finding space and picking out passes with ease and a number of moves which he inspired just failed to find the feet of David Trezeguet.

Juventus' failure to extend their lead cost them on 64 minutes when the Rossoneri equalised. A cross from Ignazio Abate on the right was headed home by the lively Alexandre Pato.

The game went to penalties, but only after some Ronaldinho magic late on almost gave the home side glory.

Juventus began the shoot-out by surprisingly opting for the young Iago Falque and the occasion was too much for him as Marco Storari saved low to his left.

That was the only error from the spot and Thiago Silva, the man who inadvertently helped give Juve the lead, sealed the victory for a 5-4 win on penalties.



Milan striker Alexandre Pato celebrates his goal against Juventus during their Berlusconi trophy clash at San Siro on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

IN BRIEF

Duff joins Fulham

INTERNET, undated

Fulham have completed the signing of Damien Duff from Newcastle.

The fee for the Republic of Ireland winger has not been disclosed, but it has been confirmed Duff, 30, has signed for three years.

"I am happy that my move to Fulham has been completed and look forward to joining in with the rest of the squad's training programme immediately in preparation for two important home matches this week," said Duff on Fulham's official website.

"Fulham had a fantastic season last year and I know that having spoken to the manager in recent days that the club's ambitions remain high and I am looking forward to the challenges ahead."

Duff joined Newcastle from Chelsea during the summer of 2006, and went on to play 86 times, scoring six goals, the last of which came in the opening match of the Coca-Cola Championship season at West Brom.

Blackburn to sign Salgado

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid defender Michel Salgado is to sign a two-season deal to play for English Premiership side Blackburn, Spanish sports daily Marca said Tuesday.

The 33-year-old, who parted company with big-spending Real earlier this month after 10 years with the club, opted for Blackburn over offers from Dubai and Spanish side Zaragoza, Marca and another paper, AS, said.

AS said Salgado's agent, Gines Carvajal, will travel to Blackburn Tuesday to finalise the deal.

Salgado arrived at Real from Celta Vigo in 1999.

Negredo joining Zaragoza

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid striker Alvaro Negredo, a target of English Premier League outfit Hull City, is to sign a five-year contract with Spanish side Zaragoza on Tuesday, the Spanish sports daily Marca said.

It did not indicate the transfer fee, but said Real will have the option of buying back the player "for next to nothing."

Spanish media has said Hull was ready to meet Real's terms of an 18 million euro transfer fee plus a two-year buy-back clause worth 25 million euros -- an offer Zaragoza could not match.

But the 23-year-old wanted to remain in Spain, and Real were ready to let him.

King targets top four

AFP, London



Tottenham Hotspur captain Ledley King believes a top four finish in the Premier League is a realistic target for his team.

Spurs produced the shock result of Saturday's opening day of the 2009/10 campaign when they beat Liverpool, last season's runners-up, 2-1 at White Hart Lane.

Now they will want to prove that result was no fluke in Wednesday's match away to a Hull side that gave Spurs' London rivals Chelsea a scare before going down 2-1.

Centre-back King said the fact few pundits had predicted great things for Spurs this season had done Harry Redknapp's men a favour.

"It has been quiet here. There has not been too much talk about us and the top four," he said. "For the last few seasons everyone has been talking about us doing this and that."

"Now it has been nice to say nothing and just work hard."

"With the quality we have got, we can break into the top four."

However, King added: "We realise how tough it is after the last few seasons, but I think not being in Europe could help us."

The 28-year-old's persistent knee problems have led him to cut down on his training sessions and Wednesday's match may be too soon for King to play again.

"I would love to play on Wednesday, but I might have to look at the bigger picture," King said. "I could probably force it, but at the same time we have to be sensible."

So King's fellow centre-half Sebastian Bassong, who scored the winner against Liverpool on his debut, could now find himself alongside Vedran Corluka at the KC Stadium with both Jonathan Woodgate (groin) and Michael Dawson (Achilles) still injured.

"We can play at White Hart Lane, now we have to prove we can play away on a more consistent basis," said Redknapp.

"It is going to be an open league this year. We just have to keep going and see where it takes us."

Hull boss Phil Brown was encouraged by his side's opening day display but knows the Tigers need more forward firepower if they are to avoid being drawn into another relegation battle.

"We know we need more goals and we hope the arrival of a new striker will solve that problem for us. Hopefully we will bring someone in quickly."

Portsmouth travel to Birmingham City on Wednesday with South Africa midfielder Aaron Mokoena

saying uncertainty over Sulaiman Al-Fahim's stalled takeover for the club cannot be used as an excuse for poor performances.

The south coast side suffered a 1-0 loss to Fulham on Saturday, a match watched from the stands at Fratton Park by Al-Fahim who has insisted his bid for the south coast club remains on course.

But Mokoena, who joined Portsmouth on a free transfer from Blackburn Rovers, said the team had to forget that the likes of England trio Peter Crouch, Jermain Defoe and Glen Johnson had all been sold and concentrate on the task at hand against City.

"It is going to be difficult this season, but we are ready," he told the Portsmouth News.

"There has been a lot of speculation off the field, but as players we try not to let what is happening off the field affect us at all. We know we have to do the business on the field. That is our job."

Mokoena added: "We could never use it as an excuse. We have professional senior players here."

City pushed champions Manchester United before losing 1-0 on their return to the top-flight last weekend and manager Alex McLeish said: "We have to use that as a confidence booster."

"We can go into the next game with the evidence of a great performance."

Wednesday's other matches see United away to newly-promoted Burnley while Liverpool will look to bounce back against Stoke.

FIXTURES

(1845GMT unless stated):
Wednesday
Birmingham v Portsmouth,
Burnley v Manchester United, Hull
v Tottenham, Liverpool v Stoke
(1900GMT)

C'Ron to rival Becks

Football

AFP, Madrid

Cristiano Ronaldo has the potential to replace David Beckham as the footballer who earns the most money from endorsements following his world record 130-million dollar move to Real Madrid, experts say.

"There is certainly a vacancy for a football central brand right now," said Simon Chadwick, professor of sport business strategy and marketing at Coventry University in England.

"Beckham, because of his age and the stage of his career, has lost it. And Ronaldo is ideally placed to assume the mantle of 'brand Beckham', especially among young kids and teenagers," he told AFP.

Chadwick, who has studied what makes a strong sports player brand, said Ronaldo has many of the required qualities: he is highly skilled, has a good physique, plays at a successful team and has enjoyed "sustained" success.

The 24-year-old Portuguese winger has already appeared bare-chested in adverts for Pepe Jeans, as well as in campaigns for Nike, Coca-Cola, the video game FIFA Street 2 and Indonesian energy drink Extra Joss.

He earned 19.6 million dollars a year at Manchester United off the pitch from product endorsements, compared to 42.5 million dollars earned by the 34-year-old Beckham last year, according to British media reports.

With his move to Real, where he will play alongside other big-name new recruits like Kaka and Karim Benzema, Ronaldo is following in the footsteps of Beckham who also left Manchester United for a successful spell at Real.

"He is in a fantastic position. Both clubs are very good at marketing their brand and players and have a huge fan base," said Jamie Wynne-Morgan, managing director of M&C Saatchi Sport and Entertainment.

"He needs to be careful not to be overexposed and make the right strategic decisions, not do lots of little deals," added Wynne-Morgan, whose agency advised on a deal that saw Ronaldo sign up as a "global ambassador" for engine oil company Castrol earlier this year.

Ronaldo, the 2008 FIFA world player of the year, signed a six-year deal with Real worth 94 million euros and will reportedly be paid 13 million euros each season, making him the world's most expensive player.

His appeal to the youth market coveted by advertisers was underscored at his official unveiling on July 6 at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium as nearly 80,000 ecstatic fans, mainly teenagers and young adults, turned out to welcome him.

Ronaldo however lacks the seemingly stable family life which Beckham, who now plays for Los Angeles Galaxy, enjoys and is often accused of not being a team player, two factors which could decrease his "likeability" factor and appeal to advertisers.

"Beckham was so successful at Real in part because he was seen as playing for the team. I don't think Ronaldo has that. Off field Ronaldo needs to get married, settle down with a nice girl, and start a family," said Chadwick.

How much Ronaldo earns from endorsements will ultimately depend on his performance on the pitch since companies seek endorsements from top players like Ronaldo because they want to be associated with their success.

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Messi, Ibra fit to play against City

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona's star strikers Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Lionel Messi have both been declared fit to play against Manchester City in a pre-season game on Wednesday.

For Ibrahimovic it will be his first match for the club since his transfer from Inter Milan this summer. The 27-year-old Swedish striker underwent surgery on a broken hand last month.

Messi, 22, has been suffering from a muscle strain in his left thigh.

Both trained with the squad on Tuesday and are available to play some part for Barca in the Joan Gamper Trophy, an annual pre-season match, against the English Premiership side, Barcelona said on its website.

The Catalan giants, who won a unique treble of Spanish league, Cup and European Champions League last season, then face Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in the return leg of the Spanish Supercup.

On August 28, they play Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk in the European Supercup.

The Spanish league season begins on the weekend of August 29-30.

Chelsea sell Pizarro to Bremen

INTERNET, undated

Chelsea have sold striker Claudio Pizarro to Werder Bremen on a permanent transfer, and brought in Serbian international midfielder Nemanja Matic.

The Peruvian spent last season on loan at the Wessestadion and scored 17 goals in 26 appearances, while helping them reach the UEFA Cup final.

Bremen were Pizarro's first European club, spending two seasons there between 1999 and 2001 before moving to Bayern Munich then Chelsea.

He never settled at Stamford Bridge after joining in 2007, and scored just twice in 28 appearances.

The Blues have also signed midfielder Matic from Slovakian club MFK Kosice.

The 21-year-old has been capped twice by Serbia and has completed his switch to Stamford Bridge for a fee of £1.5 million.

MSK president Blazej Podolak said the transfer was completed because "the money does not come in instalments, but immediately".

Matic does not need a work permit as he also holds Slovak nationality.

The 6'4" left-footer had a trial at Middlesbrough last season and played for Serbia at the recent U21 European Championships.

Lyon face Anderlecht

AFP, Paris



Lyon must overcome Belgian heavyweights Anderlecht if they are to take their place in the Champions League group stages for the tenth consecutive season.

The deposed French champions host the side from Brussels in Wednesday's first leg of the play-offs missing midfielder Sidney Govou.

The France international picked up a thigh problem in the 1-0 league win over Valenciennes at the weekend when he had to be replaced by Brazilian Ederson.

Lyon coach Claude Puel, while relieved to have avoided the likes of Arsenal and Atletico Madrid, has no illusions about the task ahead if his side are to earn one of the ten remaining group stage berths.

"I came across Anderlecht in the Champions League group round when I was manager of Lille. Last season they knocked Bordeaux out of the UEFA Cup, they have to be taken very seriously," he said when the draw was announced ahead of what will be Lyon's 155th European fixture.

He added: "We have to be in a position to get a small advantage at the stade Gerland because their stadium is very 'football' with the stands very close to the pitch."

After Saturday's narrow win in the league Puel reflected: "Wednesday's game will be an altogether different story against a team that is physically strong and aggressive with quick and mobile strikers."

"It's going to be very quick. We'll have to be more efficient than against Valenciennes and we'll have to remain vigilant right to the final whistle as it only takes two or three moves to lose any benefit from our performance."

Anderlecht manager Herman Van Holsbeek nevertheless nominated the French club as favourites to win the play-off with the second leg on Tuesday week.

"It's a tough draw, Lyon are a high class side and used to playing in the Champions League," he said before making out a case for an upset.

"Games between French and Belgian sides are often very close, yet we dominated Bordeaux in the UEFA Cup last season. And their best player, (Karim) Benzema, has left them during the close season, so perhaps it's the best time to come across them, at the beginning of the season."

Van Holsbeek, who reckons home advantage for the return leg can count in their favour, added: "We're happy to have avoided Arsenal, but Lyon were the second strongest side in the draw."

Also turning out on Wednesday's play-off programme are Atletico Madrid, who are away to Panathinaikos, both teams having reached the first knockout round last campaign, and Israeli side Maccabi Haifa, in Austria to face FC Salzburg.

FK Ventspils, who host FC Zurich, meanwhile are bidding to become the first club from Latvia to make it into the group stages.

The domestic champions will hope last week's change of personnel, with Italian Nunzio Zaverteri replacing Roman Grigorchuk as manager, pays off as they approach one of the biggest games in the club's history.

While the winners make it into the Champions League proper the losers move on to the inaugural edition of the Europa League.

FIXTURES

Wednesday
PFC Levski Sofia (BUL) v Debrecen (HUN), Lyon (FRA) v Anderlecht (BEL), FC Salzburg (AUT) v Maccabi Haifa (ISR), FK Ventspils (LAT) v FC Zurich (SUI), Panathinaikos (GRE) v Atletico Madrid (ESP)

'Super League is a reality'

Football

SOCCERNET

Arsene Wenger has revealed he believes a European Super League could become a reality within the next 10 years.

The Arsenal boss, preparing for Tuesday night's Champions League Play-off

showdown with Celtic at Parkhead, believes some clubs will soon become frustrated with the level of financial rewards on offer in Europe's leading club competition and will look for a way to start a breakaway league.

With clubs such as Manchester City and Real Madrid setting new standards for transfer spending, Wenger

believes it is highly possible there will be moves to create a new league of top clubs.

At present, UEFA ring fence the cash which comes in from the Champions League and then redistribute it. But with a new European Super League the clubs could take control of those riches.

Wenger did not go as far as to say it was a certainty, but he believes moves are afoot to make an idea which has been mooted for a long time become a reality.

"The national leagues will survive, but maybe in 10 years you will have a European league," Wenger said. "The way we are going now financially, even the money coming in from the Champions League, for some clubs who spend so much money, will not be enough anymore because the income is basically owned by UEFA and they distribute the money to the clubs."

"I'm not sure 100% that I am right, but I feel that there are some voices behind the scenes in our game aiming to do something about a European league, especially if the rules become too restrictive for the big clubs as things currently stand."

"If a European league (does happen) the question is whether clubs will transfer from a national league or whether it is a franchised European league."

"That's the question people will have to answer."

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Werder Bremen's new signing Peruvian striker Claudio Pizarro poses with his team shirt at a press conference in Bremen on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP