

Milan confirm Becks arrival

AFP, Rome

AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani on Monday confirmed that former England captain David Beckham would again join the club in the January transfer window.

Los Angeles Galaxy player Beckham arrived at the Serie A club on a similar deal earlier this year, playing out the second half of the season at the San Siro before returning to the United States.

And Galliani has claimed it is 100 per cent sure the former Manchester United and Real Madrid midfielder will be back.

"I've never spoken about buying players in January. I've read several newspapers that have written that but I never said it," Galliani told Sky Sport.

"However, someone will arrive in January, a great boost for our midfield. He's an English player, his first name is David, you can try to guess what his surname is."

"It's practically certain at 100 per cent, the only thing missing is the signatures, but the agreement is complete."

"If you're thinking about David Beckham then it's him, anyone else, absolutely not."

"One great player will join, his first name is David, his surname is Beckham. Only he will be joining, I can assure you of that."

During last season's stint at Milan, Beckham played 18 league matches, scoring twice.

'Owen is my tormentor'

THE GUARDIAN

Fabio Capello has revealed how he has been driven to distraction by the constant debate surrounding whether Michael Owen should return to the England set-up, and described the Manchester United striker as his "tormentor".

Capello, speaking at an Italian sports seminar, likened the country's obsession with Owen to that engulfing the Azzurri's World Cup-winning coach, Marcello Lippi, over his refusal to consider the Sampdoria playmaker Antonio Cassano.

"I have [Michael] Owen, I also have a tormentor," he said. "With Lippi, it's Cassano. Everyone has one."

Owen boasts 40 goals from his 89 caps but has featured only once under the Italian, as a substitute in the 1-0 friendly loss to France back in February when he was a Newcastle player with his impact severely frustrated by injuries during his four-year spell at St James' Park.

'Bayern lack leadership'

AFP, Berlin

Ex-Germany captain Oliver Kahn said Tuesday his former club Bayern Munich are suffering from a lack of leadership on the pitch as the German giants struggle for consistency this season.

"I think Bayern are missing a hierarchy at the moment," former goalkeeper Kahn told Bavarian broadcaster BR with Bayern fourth in the league and four points off leaders Leverkusen.

"It cannot be that all players are equal, a team must have a clearly structured hierarchy which is chosen by the coach."

And Kahn launched a thinly-veiled attack on Bayern's head coach Louis van Gaal as the Dutchman continues to experiment to find his strongest formation in his first season with almost a third of the league games played.

"Permanently trying out new formations is extremely problematic," said Kahn.

Kahn retired in May 2008 and says Bayern, under former boss Ottmar Hitzfeld, who guided them to the Bundesliga title in 2008, was better organised.

"The players knew who the bosses were and what to do if things went wrong," said Kahn. But van Gaal brushed off any criticism from Kahn who now does some scouting work for Bayern and is a television pundit here.

"I never change anything, if a player is injured, then of course I make changes, but there is no lack of hierarchy in my team," said the Dutchman. "Perhaps he should coach a team sometime."

"Everyone has an opinion, especially people who have never had that sort of responsibility."

"The hierarchy comes from those who are playing now, not from those with previous earlier achievements. These don't mean anything to me."



Sheikh Russel's Ghanaian midfielder Abass Imusah (2nd from L) is about to shoot during their Citycell Bangladesh League encounter against Shuktara Jubo Sangshad at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (Story on page 17)

Fergie accepts charge

AFP, London



Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson has accepted a charge of improper conduct following his comments on the fitness of referee Alan Wiley.

Ferguson criticised Wiley following his team's 2-2 Premier League draw with Sunderland at Old Trafford on October 3, saying the official was not fit enough to keep up with the pace of the match.

Those comments infuriated many referees who claimed it was unwarranted and would leave a lasting stain on Wiley's reputation.

The referees' union Prospect subsequently called for Ferguson to be given a lengthy touchline ban.

Ferguson later apologised to Wiley, by saying: "I apologise to Mr Wiley for any personal embarrassment my comments may have caused and to the FA for going public with my views."

"In retrospect I accept that they could be deemed as expressing those views in an inappropriate form. It was never my intention to bring the focus of intense media interest on Mr Wiley."

And Ferguson insisted he had never questioned Wiley's impartiality, adding: "I would wish it to be noted that I have always respected Mr Wiley's integrity and that I did not state or imply that Mr Wiley is a bad referee, that he was in any way biased, that decision-making generally during the game was poor, or that he missed any key incident during the game."

"My only intention in speaking publicly was to highlight what I believe to be a serious and important issue in the game, namely that the fitness levels of referees must match the ever increasing demands of the modern game, which I hope will now be properly addressed through the appropriate formal channels."

Many critics accused Ferguson of undermining the 'Respect' campaign of the English Football Association (FA), designed to encourage better behaviour towards officials at all levels of the game, and retired referee Jeff Winter said the Scot's criticisms of Wiley were a "cowardly attack".

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Carlo won't neglect Cup

Football

AFP, London

The English League Cup may rank a distant fourth on the list of Carlo Ancelotti's priorities this season but the Chelsea manager knows even this most derided of competitions has its value.

Anyone doubting that thesis should just cast their minds back to February 2005 when Chelsea defeated Liverpool 4-2 in the final.

That victory gave Jose Mourinho his first trophy at Stamford Bridge and provided the first concrete evidence that the club had appointed a born winner.

Ancelotti will hope that some of Mourinho's League Cup stardust rubs off on him this season as he seeks to put his stamp on Chelsea in the form of cold, hard silverware.

He should be confident enough: his team face Bolton Wanderers at home in the fourth

round on Wednesday and, while Gary Megson's team can be irksome opponents, Chelsea will still be overwhelming favourites.

The Blues boss's determined approach to the competition was underlined in the previous round, when he surprised everyone - not least members of his own squad and backroom staff - by selecting a virtually full-strength side for the visit of Championship side Queens' Park Rangers.

While Didier Drogba and Nicolas Anelka were given the night off, there were starting places for John Terry and Frank Lampard and a good job, too. Rangers proved doughty opponents and were only seen off by a single goal.

Ancelotti is expected to stick with his safety-first policy again this week, with Joe Cole set for a second outing in five days.

There will be no complaints from the England midfielder, who needs time on the pitch to regain match sharpness after eight months out with a knee injury.

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Former Russian tennis star Anna Kournikova poses in front of the crystal fountain at the famous Kuala Lumpur shopping landmark, the Pavilion on Monday.

Samp test for Juve

AFP, Rome



Serie A title pretenders Juventus and Sampdoria will have 24 hours to make up some ground on leaders Inter Milan on Wednesday.

The champions do not play until Thursday, by which time Sampdoria could have replaced them at the top if they win.

The problem for the Genoa-based club is that they face a tough away trip to Juventus, although on current form there is little to fear from the Turin giants.

Until a week ago, Juve had not won for a month and five games, but although they have managed two wins since then, neither was convincing.

Their 1-0 victory over Israeli minnows Maccabi Haifa was achieved only after some tense final moments against a team already reduced to 10 men.

And their success by the same score at Siena on Sunday was earned only through a dead ball, with Amauri heading home Brazilian compatriot Diego's free-kick.

Since then Juve have found out that striker Vincenzo Iaquinta will be out for more than a month, putting more pressure on an under-performing team already missing Alessandro Del Piero.

More than once this season Juve have also been thankful

to Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon for earning them a result.

Worse still, Sampdoria come into this game in rich goal-scoring form having destroyed Bologna 4-1 on Saturday.

Antonio Cassano was at his scintillating best at the weekend and although he didn't score, and has struggled to find the net himself this season, he was at the centre of everything creative from Sampdoria.

Buffon for one is wary of the team directly above them in the table - Sampdoria sit second, two points behind Inter and two ahead of Juve.

"We came home from Siena with an important victory but we have to improve as quickly as possible," he said.

"We've got nine crucial days now that will shape our season, both in the league and in Europe."

"We have to try to be attentive, concentrated and also confident."

"(Sampdoria) are one of the most in-form teams of the moment, and right now

they're playing the most attractive football in Italy."

Meanwhile improving AC Milan face a tough test away to another side currently on the right path, Napoli.

The southerners have won both games since former Sampdoria coach Walter Mazzarri took over from former Italy boss Roberto Donadoni.

Milan, though, are on a three-match winning streak and on each occasion have had to come from a goal down to do so.

However, vice-president Adriano Galliani insists they will work on their recent slow starts.

"I spoke with the president (Italy Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi) after the match in Verona (a 2-1 win over Chievo) and he told me the team is making him suffer too much," said Galliani.

"I asked his forgiveness and promised they'd make him suffer less in future."

All jokes apart, Milan have been somewhat fortunate to come away with three victories from games that could easily have ended all square, or even in defeat.

And it is only a matter of time before their tendency to concede early goals comes back to hurt them.

Inter are another team coming up against form opponents in Palermo, whose win over Udinese on Sunday left them fourth and believing they can challenge for a Champions League qualification position this season.

FIXTURES

Wednesday

Bologna v Siena, Catania v Chievo, Genoa v Fiorentina, Juventus v Sampdoria, Lazio v Cagliari, Livorno v Atalanta, Napoli v AC Milan, Parma v Bari, Udinese v AS Roma

Thursday

Inter Milan v Palermo

IN BRIEF

Totti endures knee op

AFP, Rome

Roma captain Francesco Totti on Monday had surgery on his right knee for the second time in 18 months, his club said in a statement.

The 33-year-old forward previously suffered a ruptured cruciate ligament in his right knee a year and a half ago but following training on Monday he went to see the club doctor, when it was decided that he would need surgery.

No details were given about long he will be on the sidelines but he is due to start his rehabilitation on Tuesday, according to the club statement, at which point an assessment will be made on when he may be available again.

Totti has been in good goalscoring form for Roma this season but has been injured for their last two matches, both of which they lost.

Luisao extends Benfica stay

AFP, Lisbon

Brazilian international defender Anderson Luis da Silva, better known as Luisao, has agreed to extend his contract with Portuguese side Benfica until 2013, the club confirmed on Monday.

The 28-year-old Benfica captain has played at the club since 2003.

"Everything is agreed for Luisao for an additional two years on his contract," club president Luis Filipe Vieira said.

Ribery expected back soon

INTERNET, undated

Franck Ribery is making progress in his recovery from a recurring knee injury and may return to action before the Bundesliga winter break, his Bayern Munich team doctor Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wohlhahrt said. France star Ribery last played in early October and has been sidelined since. Munich said last week that he won't require an operation as conservative methods are being applied.

"We will treat him for a month and then we will see. We are on a good way," Mueller-Wohlhahrt said in interviews published on Monday in several German papers.

The doctor added that "you can never fully rule it (an operation) out, but the treatment is working. Therefore he doesn't need an operation." A French doctor said last week that Ribery will need four weeks of treatment and four weeks of rehabilitation training.

Ribery will miss further Bundesliga matches and the French World Cup play-offs with Ireland in mid-November, but could be back just before the Bundesliga starts its winter break on December 20.



Inter Milan and Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o poses during the presentation of a campaign dubbed "shoes aid for Africa" in Barcelona on Monday. The campaign aims to collect sports shoes to donate to young Africans aged 5 to 24 years.

Carra back to his best

THE GUARDIAN



Rafael Benitez has praised Jamie Carragher for his display in Liverpool's 2-0 victory over Manchester United on Sunday and believes it puts to bed claims that the defender is past his best.

Carragher, 31, has by his own admission endured a difficult start to the season but was outstanding against United, when he captained Liverpool in the absence of the injured Steven Gerrard. "Jamie played well. He had been having a difficult time but the only thing to do in such a situation is to try again and try again," said Benitez.

"It was only a question of keeping working hard, and he proved that he is a good centre-back and not at the end of his career just yet. He showed what a good defender he still is and (collectively) we have shown that we are not a bad team, not a bad squad. Maybe next April people will again judge us but at this moment we have enough quality."

"We have had five players injured, all at

once. But when we are all fit we are difficult for anyone to beat."

On his own position, the Spaniard maintained: "I have not been reading the papers, or listening to anything. I was only trying to keep focused, and the players the same."

"We knew we were not that bad. We had won six on the trot before this run of four defeats, and we got 86 points last season. We are not as bad as people were saying."

"The players responded to the messages they had been given. It was simple, keep training the same way, keep working hard and things will change. In football you can talk a lot but if you do not work hard you will not change anything."

"We worked hard on lots of things, but the main thing was that everyone was together, the team, the fans, the staff. The attitude was fantastic, and you can see that we can beat anyone."

"This was the perfect answer, the perfect response because we were not winning. It was a result that will please a lot of people, maybe not United. But I have been saying all season that the top sides will lose more points that you would expect, that will make the title race more open. This is the proof."

Reserves get their break

Football

AFP, London

It might be one of English football's grand occasions but Wednesday's League Cup match between Arsenal and Liverpool is likely to reveal more about their future prospects than their current form.

Both Arsene Wenger and Rafael Benitez are likely to make a raft of changes for the game at the Emirates Stadium, mindful of the need to keep their regulars fresh for more pressing priorities in the Premier League and Europe.

In the third round win over West Bromwich Albion, Arsenal's line-up was composed of players almost exclusively under the age of 21 - Mikael Silvestre and Philippe Senderos were the sole sops to experience - and Wenger has promised to do likewise this week.

"It will be a mixed team but we want to win every single game we play, no matter who plays," he said.

Wenger will also be mindful of the possible benefits of piling more pressure on Benitez by inflicting an early exit on his team.

The Spaniard has ridden the immediate crisis created by four straight defeats by engineering a victory over Manchester United last

Sunday but Liverpool's season is still in danger of sliding away, with the club's Champions League hopes hanging by a thread and a six-point gap separating them from league leaders Chelsea.

Being dumped out of the League Cup would not precipitate any drastic action at Anfield but it would deal another blow to morale and Wenger, while he would never admit to it in public, would consider that incentive enough ahead for his makeshift team.

There are more prosaic concerns for his players, as well, not least convincing Wenger that they could be worth a place in his regular starting line-up.

Teenagers such as Francis Coquelin, Sanchez Watt, Jack Wills, Mark Randall and Kerrea Gilbert - all of whom can expect to be involved at some point on Wednesday - might still be too raw for Premier League football but that does not apply to all the stand-ins.

Carlos Vela, the Mexican winger, and Croatian striker Eduardo will be determined to re-establish themselves in Wenger's thoughts after frustrating spells out with injuries.

And with Manuel Almunia out of favour and Vito Mannone low on confidence following several errors, there is a chance for goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski, recently recovered from knee

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