

Ronaldinho can leave for €10m

INTERNET

Milan will not allow Ronaldinho to leave this summer unless any interested club makes an offer of at least 10 million euros.

The Brazilian's future is in doubt after claims from Brazil that he is ready to leave the Rossoneri for Flamengo.

The South American outfit are hoping that the player's contractual situation with the Italian giants will benefit them in their chase.

Ronaldinho has less than a year left on his contract which means he could move on a Bosman next summer.

Despite the risk of losing him on a free transfer in 2011, Milan are not willing to sell him this year for nothing or even a nominal fee.

Flamengo have already stated that they don't have the funds to make a multi-million pound offer, while LA Galaxy, another interested party, are not ready to sign him for a fee either.

Milan are expected to hold contract talks with the former Barcelona player in the near future regarding an extension.

The Rossoneri are ready to offer him a new deal but only if he agrees to a substantial wage cut, given that the club don't want to offer any player more than 4 million euros a season.

Bremen ready for Oezil offers

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen are ready to listen to offers for their German international playmaker, Mesut Oezil, the club's sporting director Klaus Allofs admitted on Sunday.

The German first division side had been hoping to extend the 21-year-old's contract but with negotiations having hit a wall, they are now bracing themselves for his exit.

"I can imagine that in the coming weeks or just before the transfer window closes, one club or another will begin to press us a little harder," said Allofs, according to sports agency SID, an affiliate of AFP.

"We will have to listen to those offers if that is what Mesut and his advisors want.

"As for our discussions (with Oezil), we have not been able to reach an agreement."

Oezil was one of the stars of the recent World Cup in South Africa when he was at the heart of the German team which came third.

Various clubs have been linked with him this summer, notably, Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United and Arsenal, where he is seen as a possible replacement for Cesc Fabregas should the Spaniard leave for Barca.

Fergie worried over Hargreaves injury

SOCCERNET

Sir Alex Ferguson has revealed that Manchester United have 'great concern' over midfielder Owen Hargreaves' latest injury setback, amid fears he will never fully recover from a career-threatening knee problem.

Hargreaves has only played 20 seconds for United since September 2008 - as an injury-time substitute against Sunderland in the penultimate game of last season - having been plagued by chronic tendinitis.

His return was warmly greeted by United supporters and Fabio Capello was even reportedly considering calling Hargreaves up to the England World Cup squad as cover for Gareth Barry.

But after breaking down again over the summer, Ferguson has sent Hargreaves back to renowned specialist Richard Steadman, who has operated on both of the midfielder's knees, to identify what has caused his latest setback.

"He is back in Colorado with a recurrence of the knee injury, which is of great concern to us," Ferguson said. "He will remain there until he is ready to come back into training."

"There is no point in him leaving the people who have treated him and performed the operation, only for us to send him back again."



Dutch star Wesley Sneijder and his wife Yolande pose for photographers after their marriage ceremony at a church in Siena on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Cesc will arrive eventually'

AFP, London



World Cup in South Africa and the defender has no doubts that his compatriot would love to return to Barca.

Fabregas, who began his career in Catalonia before moving to Arsenal as a teenager, had talks with Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger prior to the World Cup in a bid to persuade the Gunners to let him leave.

Wenger remains adamant Arsenal will not sell their prize asset and there is no sign of the deal progressing at present, but Puyol still expects Fabregas to get his wish eventually.

"Cesc is a really nice guy and desperate to become a Barcelona player," Puyol told the Daily Star on Sunday.

"But he is not the sort of player to be ruthless and start using the media to get him the move that he wants."

"There are many players who would try all sorts of tricks to make it impossible to ever play for Arsenal again but that is not his style."

"I think Arsenal need to respect his class and show the same class by giving the guy who has given so much to them the move that he and his family want."

"He isn't just being deprived of moving to the best club in the world. More importantly, he

is being deprived of coming home."

Puyol believes it is Arsenal's failure to win silverware for the last five years that has convinced Fabregas now is the time to quit the Premier League club.

"He has tried everything to win trophies at Arsenal and when he sees the success so many of his Spanish team-mates are having at Barcelona, it's only natural that he should want to be a part of that," Puyol said.

"He is the future of Barcelona and Arsenal can't do anything to stop that. I have just spent six weeks with him and there is only one club he wants to be at."

"The worst-case scenario is that we have to wait another 12 months for him to join us - but Arsenal, Barcelona and Cesc know that is the very worst-case scenario."

Puyol's comments come 24 hours after Wenger attempted to draw a line under the affair.

"He's such an important player for us, he's our captain and we want to keep him," said Wenger. "That's why we're not listening to any offers," he said.

But reports from Spain suggested Barcelona president Sandro Rosell was planning to head to London on Tuesday in a bid to unblock what is being referred to as 'Operation Fabregas'.

Barca are prepared to pay more than 40 million euros for the World Cup winner, says the daily Mundo Deportivo.

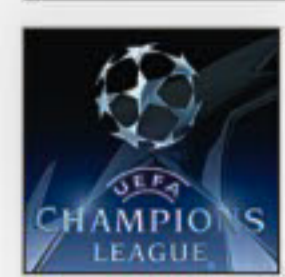
Fabregas "remains the objective for Barca this season even if it is not at any price", wrote the paper Sport.

Arsenal rejected a 35 million euro bid in June but that has not deterred Barcelona.

"He will arrive. Even if it is not now, it will be next year," Rosell told Spanish television on Friday.

Hodgson to rest stars

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool boss Roy Hodgson says he won't risk any of his squad's World Cup stars in their early Europa League qualifier.

Hodgson's team face a third qualifying round clash against either Macedonian side Rabotnicki or Armenia's Mika later this month in what will be the former Fulham manager's first competitive match in charge of the Reds.

With the first leg scheduled for July 29, Hodgson knows he is going to have to kick off without Steven Gerrard, Javier Mascherano, Jose Reina, Dirk Kuyt, Ryan Babel, Daniel Agger, Glen Johnson, Jamie Carragher and the already injured Fernando Torres.

Hodgson's medical staff have warned him about forcing those players back into action too early after their gruelling season finally came to an end in South Africa earlier this month.

"Possibly none of our World Cup players will play in the early Europa Cup games if we listen to the advice of the sports science people,"

Hodgson said.

"They are telling me we would be very foolhardy to use players who have only been training for three or four days on the back of the World Cup that early on because that will affect us further on down the road."

"If we feel we are endangering our chances of doing well in the Premier League by risking players in the early stage of the Europa League, it will be a decision the club will have to take. You have to follow the guidance."

Gerrard, Carragher, Johnson and Agger will start individual fitness programmes at the club's Melwood training ground soon, but Mascherano, Reina, Kuyt and Babel will not return until after the Europa League first leg has been played.

"Their (medical staff's) advice is to not use these players," Hodgson said. "If we have enough players to put a team out without them is another question."

"The sports science people are advising me not to use the players from the World Cup. Therefore new signings would become important for the Europa League."

L'pool agree Insua fee

REUTERS, London

Liverpool left back Emiliano Insua was poised to join Italy's Fiorentina after the two clubs agreed a fee, the Premier League team said on Saturday.

The Argentine, who has a solitary international cap, is travelling to Italy to discuss personal terms.

"We have agreed a fee for the sale of Emiliano Insua to Fiorentina and given them permission to speak with the player," a Liverpool spokesman said on their website (www.liverpoolfc.tv). "Emiliano has now left our Swiss training camp and we'll make further comment when appropriate."

Insua, 21, arrived at Liverpool in 2007 from Argentina's Boca Juniors, played 62 games for the Merseyside club and scored one goal.

Fan buys Jabulani on eBay

INTERNET

The Adidas Jabulani ball used in the FIFA World Cup final between Spain and the Netherlands has been auctioned off on eBay to a well-off football fan for 48,200 pounds.

According to reports, more than 130 auction bids were placed for the ball, which had an initial price of 99 pounds.

The money will be given to former South African President Nelson Mandela's 46664 charity promoting education, training and research in Africa to relieve child poverty and Aids.

The Jabulani was developed at UK's Loughborough University, and was the official match ball for the tournament in South Africa.

The ball is made from eight spherically moulded panels and has a textured surface intended to improve aerodynamics.

However, the ball received extensive criticism from players and coaches before and during the World Cup, who said that the path of the ball through the air is unpredictable.

Jose impresses Iker

SOCCERNET



Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas admits he has been impressed by the approach of new coach Jose Mourinho ahead of their upcoming Primera Division campaign.

Spain captain Casillas lifted the World Cup just a week ago in South Africa, but his thoughts are already beginning to turn to the new domestic season.

Madrid's World Cup stars were originally due back at the club for pre-season training on August 9, but Mourinho has decided he wants his players to return a week earlier.

"I have spoken to him a couple of times and I like his way of thinking," Casillas told AS. "He wants the players to come back rested and ready to work. Being world champions makes you forget about everything."

Casillas anticipates an intriguing battle with fierce rivals Barcelona next season, but believes Spain's World Cup triumph may have

brought the supporters of the two clubs closer together.

"I think we have made the fans (of both clubs) feel more reflected," he said.

"There are Madrid fans that appreciate (Barcelona midfielder) Xavi, for example, or Catalans who like the dedication of (Real full-back Sergio) Ramos."

In the meantime, however, the Spain captain says he wants to keep on savouring his side's World Cup success.

"In South Africa it was a strange sensation. We were so far away and we didn't know what the atmosphere was like in Spain. We were desperate to get back and celebrate it here and what we have experienced has been unforgettable."

And Casillas says he is happy to see the triumph being celebrated by the whole country, despite the fact that some regions want independence from Spain.

"That was the best thing of all," he said.

"We have given a lot of joy to the people. We don't get involved with politics. I respect the ideologies of everyone, but we have to be centred on our sport."

Essien returns, scores

Football

AFP, London

Premier League champions Chelsea kicked off their pre-season preparations with a 1-0 win over Crystal Palace on Saturday, while there were also wins for Arsenal, Manchester United and Everton.

Chelsea midfielder Michael Essien made a goalscoring return after missing Ghana's World Cup campaign with a knee injury, netting the winning goal in the 60th minute with a crisp shot from the edge of the Palace area.

"It was an important return, he came back very well and played very well," said Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"He is a fantastic player, we missed him last season and we hope he can do the best for this season."

Summer signings Laurent Koscielny and Marouane Chamakh both made their debuts as Arsenal cruised to a 4-0 win in their traditional pre-season curtain-raiser against English fourth-tier side Barnet.

Russian attacking midfielder Andrey Arshavin put Arsene Wenger's men 1-0 up after dancing around the goalkeeper in the third minute, before a neat brace by young striker Jay Simpson put the game beyond Barnet.

France international Samir Nasri scored Arsenal's fourth in the 75th minute when he seized on a mistake by a Barnet defender before calmly beating the goalkeeper.

Manchester United, who finished second behind Chelsea in the Premier League last season, began their North American tour with a 3-1 defeat of Scottish giants Celtic in Toronto.

Dimitar Berbatov put United ahead in the 34th minute, burying the ball in the bottom-

right corner with his left foot after controlling Mame Biram Diouf's left-wing cross.

Celtic drew level just after the hour when Giorgios Samaras netted a penalty following debutant Chris Smalling's foul on Celtic new boy Joe Ledley, before Danny Welbeck restored United's lead from Berbatov's cutback.

Berbatov then teed up Tom Cleverley, whose shot in the 86th minute deflected off a Celtic defender to leave Celtic keeper Lukasz Zaluska stranded.

"I enjoyed the whole game," said Berbatov. "We have started well with a win. We have a lot of games before the season starts so I think we will be fully prepared."

Liverpool's friendly against Al-Hilal in Switzerland was called off after the pitch was deemed unplayable following heavy rain.

It means new Reds boss Roy Hodgson will have to wait until Wednesday, when they face Swiss side Grasshoppers, for his first game since taking over from Rafael Benitez.

Everton rounded off their Australian tour with a third straight win thanks to a goal eight minutes from time against Brisbane Roar from new signing Magaye Gueye.

The Frenchman latched onto an inviting low cross from Jose Baxter to tuck the ball home at the back post and give the Toffees a 2-1 victory.

Highly rated English midfielder Jack Rodwell gave the visitors the lead with a delightful 20-yard shot in the 49th minute, before Kosta Barbarouses drew the Roar level in the second half.

Elsewhere, Bobby Zamora earned last season's Europa League runners-up Fulham a 1-1 draw at Bournemouth while promoted Newcastle won 3-0 at Carlisle thanks to goals from Leon Best, Nile Ranger and Haris Vuckic.

Sunderland saw off Darlington 1-0, Wolves beat Bohemians 3-0 while Blackburn enjoyed a 2-0 win over non-league Fleetwood Town.

Napoli snap up Cavani

REUTERS, Milan



Napoli signed Uruguay World Cup forward Edinson Cavani from Palermo on Saturday, one of the first big moves in Serie A during the close-season transfer window.

"I have already talked with Cavani on the telephone. He is happy, enthusiastic and wants to start this new adventure," Napoli sporting director Riccardo Bigon told the club's website (www.sscnapoli.it) without giving details of deal.

Cavani, 23, scored once and linked well with fellow forwards Diego Forlan and Luis Suarez in Uruguay's surprise run to the semi-finals of the World Cup, and now joins international team mate Walter Gargano in Naples.

The arrival of Cavani, who had been linked in the media with Inter Milan, opens the door for striker German Denis to sign for Udinese given Napoli also boast Italy forward Fabio Quagliarella and Argentine frontman Ezequiel Lavezzi.

Palermo finished fifth in Serie A last term, a spot above Napoli, and the wisdom of selling one of their best players to a direct rival has upset some fans in Sicily.

The Italian league could be more open than for several years in the coming season given ageing Inter will struggle to match last term's stunning treble success and AC Milan and AS Roma are keeping a low profile in the transfer market.

Juventus are rebuilding after last season's dreadful showing so there could be space for a club such as Napoli or Palermo to break into the top four.

Napoli have also loaned winger Jesus Datolo to Spain's Espanyol.

Juarez joins Celtic

REUTERS, Glasgow

Mexican international defender Efraim Juarez has joined Celtic after agreeing a four-year deal, the Scottish Premier League club said on Saturday.

Celtic said on their website (www.celticfc.net) the 22-year-old had met up with his new team mates in Seattle during their pre-season tour of North America.

The Glasgow club added that a work permit had been approved for the player, who joins from Mexico's Pumas UNAM after playing for his country at the World Cup in South Africa.

"He will undergo a medical in Seattle, while the club are in the process of finalising all documentation," Celtic added.

The club have already signed South Korean international defender Cha Du-ri along with Charlie Mulgrew, Joe Ledley and Daryl Murphy for the new campaign starting on Aug. 14.

Earthquakes hold Spurs

AFP, San Jose

Goalkeeper Carlo Cudicini made six saves as the Tottenham Hotspur played to a scoreless tie with the San Jose Earthquakes in an exhibition game on Saturday.

Cudicini had a strong game in Tottenham's first tune-up before the start of the English Premier League on August 14. Cudicini, who missed a good portion of last season following a motorcycle accident, made three saves in the first half.

The Hotspurs, which finished fourth in the Premier League last season, played without strikers Peter Crouch, Jermain Defoe and Giovanni Dos Santos, all of whom took part in the World Cup.

Tottenham managed just four shots on goal including three in the second half in front of a crowd of 10,712 at Buck Shaw Stadium.

The London club looked rusty after arriving in the USA late Wednesday following a 10-hour flight.



EDINSON CAVANI