



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov (L) shoots to score the opening goal against Newcastle United during their Premier League encounter at Old Trafford on Monday.

## MU rout Magpies

AFP, Manchester



Dimitar Berbatov, Darren Fletcher and Ryan Giggs scored as Manchester United began their Premier League campaign with a 3-0 win over Newcastle here on Monday giving the losers a sharp reminder of the gulf in class between the Championship and the elite league.

United had a comfortable advantage over last season's Championship winners by half time even though it proved to be another frustrating night for Wayne Rooney, who remains goalless for club and country since scoring against Bayern Munich in a Champions League match in March.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was especially impressed by veteran midfielder Paul Scholes and delighted with the result against what he termed a tough outfit.

"They got into the Premier League last season by being a determined and a good unit with a good work ethic," said Ferguson.

"We were wasteful with some chances. Dimitar Berbatov could have scored three or four, but his performance was excellent. The three points is always important in your first home match. It was a steady performance."

Berbatov finished off a fine move with just over half an hour gone before Fletcher's close-range effort made it two at the interval.

And substitute Giggs extended the advantage with a third goal with five minutes remaining maintaining his extraordinary record of having scored in all 19 seasons he has played in the top flight.

Chelsea ended United's run of three successive Premier League titles with their victory last season but began their attempts to win the crown for a record 19th time in some style.

Newcastle's survival chances will never be

judged on trips to Old Trafford but they showed they are well-organised and Andy Carroll looks like he might manage the step up to the top flight.

They began by managing to contain their hosts and Rooney's hopeful curled effort as the only occasion that the Old Trafford side threatened in the early stages.

And the newly-promoted side should have taken the lead when Carroll met Joey Barton's corner unmarked from six yards but glanced his header wide.

Nani had a long-range effort deflected wide and then thumped a free kick into the wall as the home side's frustration continued.

Carroll went close again with a 25-yard drive that was held by goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar.

Even when James Perch and Mike Williamson were guilty of slack clearances, Nani failed to take advantage for United.

But the Portuguese did force a scrambling punch from Steve Harper with a lofted cross to the far post for Berbatov.

And Rooney also lifted a shot over the bar after Berbatov headed down Antonio Valencia's cross.

But just after the half hour, the home team grabbed the lead when Valencia robbed Jonas Gutierrez in midfield, and John O'Shea fed Scholes, who slid through for Berbatov to find the corner of the net.

Barton tested van der Sar once again with a powerful strike to the near post.

But United doubled their lead before the interval thanks to fine work by Patrice Evra.

The French defender burst into the area and his low cross had too much on it for Rooney, but Fletcher fired in on the turn.

Two of the home team's veterans combined to put the game well beyond Newcastle.

A short corner was worked in-field and Scholes picked out Giggs, who found the corner with a placed volley.

## Bayern far from best

Football

AFP, Berlin

Holders Bayern Munich were far from their best as they laboured to a 4-0 victory over fifth-division Windeck in the first round of the German Cup on Monday.

Reigning German champions and finalists in last season's Champions League, Bayern had to wait until the 43rd minute to take the lead.

Michael Kessel had twice gone close for the amateur team before German international Miroslav Klose put Bayern ahead by acrobatically converting a cross from Diego Contento.

France winger Franck Ribery doubled the advantage two minutes later to put the Bavarian giants 2-0 up at the change of ends.

It was not until the game's closing stages

that Bayern's class began to shine through, with strikes from Toni Kroos (in the 84th minute) and Mario Gomez (85) finally putting the game beyond their opponents.

Bayern, who will be without injured Dutch winger Arjen Robben until October, begin their German title defence in the opening game of the Bundesliga season against Wolfsburg on Friday.

"It's always hard to have maximum concentration against a small team, but it's our worst match since the start of pre-season," said Bayern coach Louis van Gaal.

"We should also give credit to our opponents, who played very well for 90 minutes. We did what we had to do, that's all."

Two Bundesliga clubs have already fallen to lower league opposition in the first round of the German Cup, with St Pauli losing 1-0 to fourth-division Chemnitz and Hannover knocked out on penalties by fourth-tier Elversberg.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Bayern Munich starlet Toni Kroos (R) celebrates his goal with teammate Thomas Mueller during their German Cup clash against Germania Windeck in Cologne on Monday.

## Putin's weight behind Russian WC bid

Football

AFP, Moscow

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Tuesday gave his wholehearted backing to Russia's World Cup bid, as he met FIFA inspectors evaluating the viability of it hosting the showpiece for the first time.

He added that Russian authorities were ready to put into action a visa-free regime for the participants and the guests of the event. Russia is hoping to host either the 2018 or the 2022 World Cup.

Russia's first deputy prime minister Igor Shuvalov, the head of the Russian Football Union (RFU) Sergei Fursenko and the country sports minister Vitaly Mutko also took part in the meeting with the FIFA six-man board, led by the President of Chilean Football Federation Harold Mayne-Nicholls.

The Russian strongman said that Russia would do everything to hold the World Cup at the highest possible level, if FIFA decided to entrust Russia with the holding of the football's biggest extravaganza.

"If FIFA grant us the honour to hold the World Cup we are ready to provide them with all possible government guarantees," Putin said.

"That means we are ready to put into action visa-free regime for the participants and the guests of the World Cup."

"Russia will hold the event at the highest possible level," the prime minister added.

"I have no doubt that it will be interesting for both the participants and the guests of the event and they will enjoy it."

struction works at the country's possible World Cup facilities would take place even if Russia's bid to host the 2018 tournament failed.

FIFA inspection chief Mayne-Nicholls replied that he was delighted to see the Russian government was fully supporting the country's World Cup hosting bid.

"It was very important for us to recognise that the country's government supports the plans of construction works that are needed for holding the World Cup," he said.

"The possibility of the introduction of a visa-free regime is also very important."

On Wednesday the inspectors, who arrived to St Petersburg on Monday, are set to visit Kazan, the hometown of Russia's reigning football champions Rubin and Sochi.

On Thursday the FIFA inspectors will return to Moscow to hold a news conference before their departure.

Russia's bid book, which was sent to FIFA on May, suggested the World Cup would be staged by 13 cities grouped into four clusters, which are situated mainly in the European part of the country.

Russia is the inspectors' fifth stop in their tour of nine countries that are bidding to host the 2018 or 2022 FIFA World Cup tournaments.

The FIFA delegates are also expected to visit England, Spain and Portugal, who also prepared a joint bid, the United States and Qatar and will draw up reports on the feasibility of each bid.

Japan, South Korea, Australia and Qatar -- all members of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) -- have submitted bids for 2022 only, while the others are seeking to host either 2018 or 2022.

## City agree Milner fee

SOCCERNET

Manchester City have agreed a player-plus-cash deal with Premier League rivals Aston Villa for James Milner.

Milner, 24, will undergo a medical at Eastlands on Tuesday afternoon and City midfielder Stephen Ireland will move in the opposite direction to Villa Park.

City manager Roberto Mancini hopes to tie up all the loose ends by Wednesday at the latest.

"I hope we can close it between today and tomorrow," Mancini said.

"I think that Milner is a good player, an English player which is important. I think that Milner can play in different positions."

City have been pursuing the England international all summer and had an initial bid rejected before the start of the World Cup. The final fee is reported to be around £20 million.

Milner played his final game for Villa in their opening Premier League fixture on Saturday, starring and scoring in a 3-0 home win over West Ham. He received a standing ovation from the home fans.

The midfielder moved to Aston Villa in 2008 having enjoyed a successful loan spell at Villa Park during the 2005/2006 season. Last term he was named the PFA Young Player of the Year and was also selected in the Premier League's Team of the Year.

## 'Masche can go for right price'

SOCCERNET

Liverpool manager Roy Hodgson is still hopeful of keeping want-away midfielder Javier Mascherano at the club but admits they have a verbal agreement with the player to allow him to leave if a decent bid is received.

Mascherano has been linked with a move to Inter Milan to be reunited with former Reds boss Rafa Benitez, as well as Spanish Liga giants Barcelona and Real Madrid, but as yet, no club has made an offer for the Argentine international.

Hodgson said: "We want to keep him here and we will keep him here unless an offer comes along that is correct."

"As yet we haven't had any offers. There's two weeks to go in the transfer window and some of these clubs for some reason like to come in with offers on the 28th or 29th of August."

"But we want to keep him here and we will keep him here unless an offer comes along that is correct - one that is commensurate with his value and one where we would think it would be wrong to turn down because we've said to him if that offer comes in we'll accept it."

"At the moment it's not there, it's not even on the horizon. If all these clubs are interested it would be nice if they contacted Liverpool one day."

## Real snap up Ozil

Football

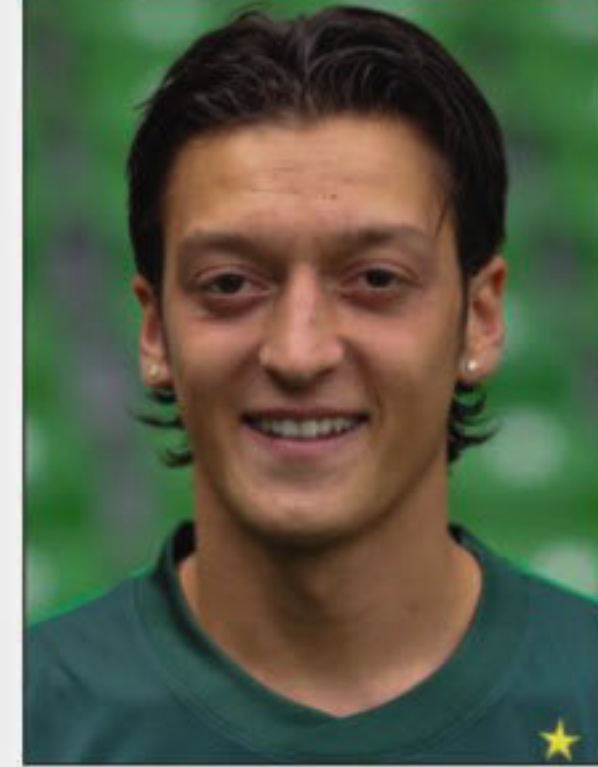
AFP, Berlin

Germany star Mesut Ozil has quit the Bundesliga and Werder Bremen to sign a contract with Spanish giants Real Madrid for an undisclosed fee, it was announced on Tuesday afternoon.

"We respect that Mesut wants to go and take the next step in his career," said Werder Bremen's director of sport Klaus Allofs in a statement.

Ozil was one of the stars at last month's World Cup and the attacking midfielder played a key role in helping Germany finish third.

With Werder Bremen preparing for a Champions League qualifying match against Sampdoria on Wednesday, the 21-year-old Ozil sat out training on Tuesday and is expected in



MESUT OZIL

Madrid on Wednesday to undergo a medical.

Ozil joined Bremen in January 2008 from Schalke 04 and won the German Cup with Werder in 2009.

He has played 71 games for Werder and scored 12 goals.

Having won the European Under-21 Championships with Germany in June 2009, he

was nominated as one of the ten best players at the World Cup in South Africa.

"Mesut Ozil lands at Real Madrid after a standout performance at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa," Real meanwhile announced on their website.

"The midfielder earned a permanent spot on Germany's senior side by the age of 21 after winning the 2009 Under-21 European Championship."

"His unique touch, unmatched individual technique, excellent ball control and deadly last pass make the German midfielder one of the brightest up-and-coming stars in European football."

Ozil, a gifted and versatile midfielder with a great left foot, was spotted by Schalke whose academy he joined in 2005.

Within a year he had graduated to the first team and he made his Bundesliga debut at just 17.

## Bellamy returns home

Football

AFP, London

Manchester City's Welsh international striker Craig Bellamy has joined his hometown club, second tier Championship side Cardiff City, on a year's loan, City said Tuesday.

A statement on Manchester City's official website, www.mcfc.co.uk, read: "Manchester City can confirm that Craig Bellamy has agreed to join Championship club Cardiff City on a season-long loan."

"He will be officially unveiled in south Wales later today and, subject to Premier League and Football League ratification, will join up with Dave Jones' side in time to make his debut at home to Doncaster Rovers at the weekend."

Bellamy, 31 and captain of Wales, supported Cardiff as a boy and had revealed last week that he was missing his wife and children, who live in Cardiff.

Bellamy is surplus to requirements at big-spending Manchester City just 16 months after joining from West Ham for 14 million pounds

(20 million dollars) which took the total outlay on him during his career to nearly 45 million pounds.

He had also been linked with a loan move to Celtic, where he played on loan from Newcastle five years ago but preferred the lure of Wales and a side which just missed out on promotion to the Premier League last season.

Bellamy had also been a target of City's Premier League rivals Spurs, who edged them out of a Champions League spot last season, but they did not want him playing for another EPL side.

However, the fiery striker - who appears to have calmed down his off the field behaviour of late - said he was fulfilling a dream by joining Cardiff.

"I'm thrilled to be coming home to Cardiff," he told the club's website.

"I am excited at the prospect of wearing the shirt and playing for the club that I've supported since I was a boy," he added.

Cardiff manager Dave Jones - who took Cardiff to the play-off final last season where they lost to Blackpool - said signing Bellamy showed the ambition the club had.

## Trapattoni discharged

AFP, Dublin

Ireland manager Giovanni Trapattoni left hospital here on Tuesday a week after undergoing a stomach operation.

The 71-year-old Italian had been taken ill last week prior to the friendly with Argentina with severe abdominal pains which was at first put down to shellfish he had eaten in Italy before flying to Ireland.

However, it was subsequently diagnosed that the pains had been caused by scar tissue from an earlier operation.

"Giovanni Trapattoni left hospital this morning (Tuesday) and would like to thank the nursing staff for looking after him so well," read a statement from the Irish football federation.

Trapattoni's assistant Marco Tardelli oversaw the 1-0 friendly defeat at the newly rebuilt 50,000-seater Lansdowne Road stadium.

## Lyon suffer double blow

AFP, Lyon

Lyon, already stunned by a weekend loss at promoted Caen, face having to rejig their side in the coming weeks with defender Cris and midfielder Michel Bastos having suffered thigh muscle tears in the game, the club said on Monday.

Lyon said it was not known how long the pair would be out of action for but both are likely to be on the sidelines for up to a month.

Lyon already face being without Brazilian midfielder Honorato Ederson for up to six months after he ruptured tendons in his left thigh during last week's friendly international against the United States.

Ederson was operated on Monday.



PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho signs autographs surrounded by press and fans during their arrival at the Liege Bierseet Airport yesterday ahead of their friendly against Standard Liege.