

Chelsea break bank for Torres

AFP, London

England's Premier League clubs were back splashing the cash and defying austerity in a transfer window that climaxed with Fernando Torres's record-breaking £50 million (\$80.5 million, 58.5 million euro) move from Liverpool to Chelsea.

In a dramatic finale to the transfer window on Monday, reigning champions Chelsea smashed the British record with their purchase of the Spanish striker.

As the clock ticked towards the deadline, Liverpool agreed a deal to sign 22-year-old Newcastle forward Andy Carroll -- still in only his first Premier League season -- for a club record £35 million.

In the end, total spending by English Premier League clubs approached £200 million (\$321 million) compared to £29 million last January, proving again that when it comes to football, prudence goes out of the window.

Football likes to play by its own rules and the mantra of 'spend big to win big' might have been coined with the Premier League in mind.

Since 2003, Chelsea have been bankrolled by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich and Monday's swoop underlined his ambition to re-assert the club's dominance after a shaky start to the season.

Last season he reined in his spending yet Chelsea still won the double of the Premier League and English FA Cup.

However, Abramovich's ultimate ambition is to win the Champions League, hence his decision to 'revert to type' with the big-money signing of Torres and Brazilian defender David Luiz in a £21 million deal.

Torres, 26, was keen to leave a Liverpool team which has failed to challenge for major honours in recent seasons, although new manager Kenny Dalglish told him he was



Liverpool supporters burn a Fernando Torres shirt after waiting for the arrival of new signing Andy Carroll at Melwood training ground on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP

leaving a team on the rise.

Abramovich's spending spree Monday represents "only a fraction of his undoubted wealth," according to Joe McLean, a partner at accountants Grant Thornton, who specialises in football finance.

"What we have to do is look at the entire investment he has made thus far in Chelsea.

That would suggest he has paid over £750 million to £800 million into Chelsea over the last five or six years, which is 15-20 per cent of his entire wealth," McLean told BBC Radio on Tuesday.

Chelsea's huge outlay on Torres came on the same day they announced an annual loss of £71 million.

That has led to fears they could be barred from the Champions League by contravening 'fair play' rules set to be introduced by European governing body UEFA that are designed to get a grip on club finances.

When the American-based Fenway Sports Group (FSG) bought Liverpool in October, its chairman John W Henry said:

"When we spend a dollar, it has to be wisely."

In signing Carroll -- capped just once by England so far -- Liverpool have opted for a player based more on potential than proven ability, although his 11 league goals this season have shown the long-haired striker's effectiveness.

Liverpool's spending did not end with Carroll. As he arrived at Anfield, the club completed the signing of Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez from Dutch club Ajax for £22.6 million (\$36 million).

Aston Villa, with only goal difference separating them from the relegation zone, raised eyebrows when they signed Darren Bent from league rivals Sunderland for £24 million earlier this month.

Bent promptly scored a match-winner on his debut and, if Villa avoid the drop, his arrival at the Midlands club will look like money well spent.

There is no doubt money can propel an otherwise struggling side towards the top of the table -- Manchester City have been transformed since being taken over by Sheikh Mansour, although not all their signings have been successful.

The Abu Dhabi-based Mansour brought Robinho to City for a then British record of £34.2 million only for the Brazil forward to fail to settle in England and leave for Italy's AC Milan at a loss of £20 million.

TOP 10 TRANSFERS

Fernando Torres (Liverpool to Chelsea)	50million pounds
Andy Carroll (Newcastle to Liverpool)	35million
Robinho (Real Madrid to Man City)	32.5million
Andriy Shevchenko (AC Milan to Chelsea)	30.8million
Dimitar Berbatov (Tottenham to Man United)	30.75million
Rio Ferdinand (Leeds to Man United)	29.1million
Juan Sebastian Veron (Lazio to Man United)	28.1million
Wayne Rooney (Everton to Man United)	27million
Edin Dzeko (Wolfsburg to Man City)	27million

IN brief

Wiese given 3-match ban

AFP, Berlin

Werder Bremen goalkeeper Tim Wiese was on Monday banned for three matches following his red card in Saturday's 3-1 loss to Bayern Munich, the German football federation announced.

Wiese was sent off in the 88th minute for an ill-considered last ditch attempt to stop goal advancing Thomas Muller.

He was replaced by 21-year-old Sebastian Mielitz who is set to stand in for Werder's number one stopper in the games against Mainz 05, Hanover and Hamburg.

The suspension comes at a difficult time for Bremen who are languishing fourth from bottom, three points off the relegation zone.

Juventus sign Matri

AFP, Rome

Juventus moved on Monday to strengthen their depleted resources up front by signing Alessandro Matri on loan from Serie A rivals Cagliari while they sent Amauri on loan to Parma.

Matri, 26 and scorer of 11 goals this season, will cost Juventus 2.5million euros in the loan deal.

Juventus have fallen to seventh in the championship this season, following a home defeat to Udinese on Sunday, and are presently missing injured Italian international trio Fabio Quagliarella, who is out for the remainder of the campaign, Luca Toni and Vincenzo Iaquinta.

Inter swap defenders

AFP, Rome

Italian champions Inter Milan took Japanese defender Yuto Nagatomo on loan from Serie A rivals Cesena while sending Davide Santon in the opposite direction on Monday.

Nogatomo, 24, impressed during his country's Asian Cup victory this month and had been at Cesena since last July.

He is Inter's fourth signing during the transfer window, having already secured the services of Sampdoria striker Giampaolo Pazzini - who paid back part of his fee immediately with a double at the weekend - Moroccan midfielder Houssine Kharja from Genoa and another Genoa player, defender Andrea Ranocchia.

USA cancel Egypt friendly

AFP, Chicago

US football authorities said Monday that America's friendly match scheduled in Cairo for February 9 has been cancelled because of political unrest in Egypt.

The match between the USA and the reigning Africa Cup of Nations champions Egypt had been announced on December 13 and would have been the first ever in Egypt for a US side.

"Due to the current situation, all parties agreed it was best to cancel the match," US Soccer Federation



Real Madrid stars Cristiano Ronaldo (L) and Kaka take part in a training session at Madrid Sport City yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP

'Real still have a chance'

AFP, Madrid



Former Barcelona legend Johan Cruyff said Monday Real Madrid still have a chance at the league title despite going seven points behind Barcelona.

Real Madrid crashed to a shock 1-0 defeat at relegation-threatened Osasuna on Sunday, and they were all but written off for the Liga title by most of the Spanish sporting press.

"I am not going to say that this Liga is decided, because it is not," Cruyff wrote in his weekly column for the north-eastern Spanish regional daily El Periodico de Catalunya.

"Seven points and the goal average are a lot, because Barca is not planning to give anything away. But beware, no-one should bury Madrid," he added.

Jose Mourinho's squad will do everything they can to hang on so they have a hope of winning at the end of the season, he said.

"But they have a problem, and it is called Barcelona," Cruyff added.

"Pep Guardiola's boys are very good, they know what they are doing and they don't care who they play against or where."

Cruyff noted Barcelona's record-equalling 15th consecutive league win with a 3-0 victory at Hercules on Saturday, matching the long-standing record of Alfredo di Stefano's great 1960-1961 Real Madrid side.



Premier Division Cricket Super League
Gazi Tank v Cricket Coaching
Venue: SCS (Bogra)
Mohammedan v Biman
Venue: SKS (Rajshahi)
Abahani v Old DOHS



STAR Cricket
Australia v England
Sixth ODI
Live from 9:20am
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
English Premiership
Blackburn v Tottenham
Live from 2:00am (Thursday)
STAR Sports
English Premiership
Liverpool v Stoke City
Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

Indian owner focuses on talent

AFP, Madrid



Racing Santander's new owner, Indian businessman Ahsan Ali Syed, said Tuesday that the Spanish

first division club will privilege talent over star power when it comes to recruiting new players.

"I would not say great names but instead great talent," he said during an interview with sports daily AS when asked if the club was looking to recruit big names to the modest club based in

the northern port city of Santander.

"We want to sign talented players, managers with talent, financial officers with talent. Everything to create a consistent club, a great club."

Syed, who made an unsuccessful 300-million-pound (480-million-dollar) bid to buy English Premier League side Blackburn Rovers earlier this season, finalised the agreement to become Santander's leading shareholder from its Spanish owners on Friday.

The club announced late on Monday its first signing since it was bought by Syed, that of Mexican international striker Giovanni dos Santos who joins Santander on loan from Tottenham until the end of the season.

Dos Santos, who came up through Barcelona's youth system before joining the English club in 2008, played in all of Mexico's matches in the 2010 World Cup.

Syed, the founder of Bahrain-based asset manager Western Gulf Advisory, had previously said in a statement that his first step

towards boosting Santander's squad would be to bring back Serbian striker Nikola Zigic from Birmingham for his third stint with the team.

But the winter transfer period ended at midnight on Monday without any move for Zigic.

Syed turned up to a rapturous welcome at

Santander's home match with Valencia on Monday which ended in a 1-1 draw, leaving the club just three points above the drop zone.

He had guaranteed himself a friendly welcome after he announced in almost his first move as owner that tickets for the Valencia match would be free to members of the club.

"I am not a magician. I would like the team to become not only a household name in Spain but also on the world stage," said Syed.

"I am very conscious of the importance of a club like Racing Santander, of what it represents to the region and at the national level. I want it to be internationally known."



Racing Santander forward Ariel Huelpan (L) is challenged by Valencia defender Hedwiges Maduro during their Primera Liga encounter at the El Sardinero Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO:
AFP