



Paraguay's Cristian Riveros (C) and Romania's Florin Gardos (L) fight for the ball during their friendly encounter at the Defensores del Chaco Stadium in Asuncion on Saturday. Paraguay won 2-0.

PHOTO: AFP

Zhang takes office

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

China's Zhang Jilong urged the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to look ahead Monday as he took up his duties as stand-in chief after its president was suspended over alleged bribes.

Zhang told staff to work together as he started work at Kuala Lumpur's AFC House, less than two weeks after world body FIFA barred Mohamed bin Hammam while it probes vote-buying claims.

"We are all united and focused on taking Asian football ahead. We have to work together to meet the challenges and ensure that Asian football continues to move forward," Zhang said in a message posted on the AFC website.

Former Chinese Football Association president Zhang, 59, served on the FIFA organising committees for the last two World Cups. He was also director of sports during the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

The AFC senior vice president's appointment as acting chief was automatic under the body's rules when Qatar's bin Hammam was suspended on May 30.

Jansen not moving

AFP, Berlin

Germany midfielder Marcell Jansen's agent on Saturday rubbished rumours his client is set to quit Hamburg for German league rivals Wolfsburg before next season.

The 25-year-old Jansen flew to the United States on Friday along with Manchester City's Jerome Boateng to work with Germany's fitness coaches Marc Verstegen and Shad Forsythe, who are based in the US.

But the former Bayern Munich star's agent insists Jansen, who can play in defence or midfield, will return to Germany as a Hamburg player.

"There is no truth in it, there is no offer," said Gerd vom Bruch.

"And no one from Hamburg has got in touch with us to say there is a good offer for Marcell."

Injuries last season restricted Jansen to just 16 Bundesliga appearances and he is travelling to the States with former Hamburg team-mate Boateng to get fit in a bid to win back his place in the German team ahead of Euro 2012.

"I'm not on the run. I want to play in Hamburg and look forward to next season," says Marcell.

"I've even decided to put in some extra training. There are up to 16 units planned on my training schedule," said Jansen, who won the last of his 36 caps against Belgium last September in a Euro 2012 qualifier.

Busy summer ahead

Football

AP, Seoul

The summer transfer market will be a busy one for some of the top talent from Asia, with established stars chasing bigger deals and another group of young guns heading to Europe.

Keisuke Honda and Park Chu-young are looking for new clubs after proving their worth in Europe, while top continental prospects Takashi Usami of Japan and South Korea's Ji Dong-won are set to join some of football's biggest leagues.

Australians Lucas Neill and Harry Kewell are also on the move with 32-year-old Kewell considering a move into the A-League amid much speculation in his homeland.

Ji could be the first to complete a deal. The 20-year-old Chunnam Dragons striker is expected to sign with Sunderland and become the eighth South Korean to play in the English Premier League.

"Of course I want to go to Europe," Ji said after scoring for Chunnam at Incheon United on the weekend. "Talks are progressing to that end."

Ji has a buy-out clause in his K-League contract and will cost Sunderland, a mid-ranking team, around \$1 million (euro 697, 000). The amount has been criticized in the Korean media as too low for one of the country's top prospects.

"The club and my agent know the details of the contract well," Ji said. "I don't know so much. It is not a big problem and won't be difficult."

After scoring in a friendly against Ghana last week his sixth goal in 11 international appearances, the striker is looking forward to returning to England where he spent 10 months in 2007 as a member of Reading's youth team.

"That was just a short time but I learned a lot. The lifestyle is not easy but I want the challenge of playing there again," he said. "I worked hard in the K-league to play in Europe. The opportunity has come more quickly than I thought."

Usami also has a buyout clause in his contract with Gamba Osaka and

the J-League club is resigned to losing the player.

Usami is only 19 and is expected to join German giant Bayern Munich. There are a growing number of Japanese players impressing in the Bundesliga with Shinji Kagawa at Borussia Dortmund and Atsuto Uchida at Schalke already making their marks in the league. "If I have a chance then I want to move to Europe while I am still young but I can't make any comment (about the move)," Usami told local media last week while on duty with the Japanese national team.

Borussia Dortmund has also been linked with teenage Australian Mustafa Amini, who plays in the A-League for Central Coast Mariners.

At 32, Kewell is still one of Australia's biggest stars and is on the move after leaving Turkish team Galatasaray.

The former Leeds United and Liverpool player has been reportedly linked to newly promoted English Premier League team QPR, but Australian teams are vying with the London club for his signature.

Clubs in Sydney and Melbourne are reportedly trying to lure Kewell, although there are concerns that they will struggle to meet the player's financial demands, reported in the Australian media to be around \$2.5 million (euro 1.7 million) a year.

"Any successful Socceroo who is interested in returning to Australia, be it Tim Cahill or Harry or whoever, will be of interest to us, and Harry is one of the most successful of all time," Sydney FC chief executive Dick Melton said. "Whether it's the right time for him remains to be seen but we need to show respect to our fans and Harry in that if he decides to come back to Australia, we'll put our case forward."

Kewell's manager, Bernie Mandic, told Monday's Sydney Morning Herald newspaper that some of the speculation about Kewell's asking price was absurd, adding that any move back to Australia would be on an entirely incentive-based deal.

Like Kewell, Neill has been released by Galatasaray. But the Socceroo captain has ruled out a return to Australia just yet.

The 33-year-old ex-Blackburn Rovers, West Ham and Everton defender wants to stay in Europe to improve his chances of playing at the 2014 World Cup.

"I still feel I've got a lot to offer there. I want to be playing at the highest level possible for me, to reward myself and my country with more opportunities," Neill said.

Asian players who have already made their names in Europe are also ready to transfer to bigger clubs and leagues.

Park, South Korea's captain, is leaving AS Monaco after three seasons. The striker scored 12 goals as the club was relegated from France's top tier, and at the age of 25, has already stated that he will head elsewhere.

"My first choice is to play for a team in the UEFA Champions League," Park said this month. Expected to cost around \$9 million (euro 6.2 million), he has been linked with moves to Liverpool and Bolton Wanderers of the English Premier League.

Liverpool, as well as Manchester City and Arsenal, has also been mentioned as a possible destination for Honda. One of the stars of the 2010 World Cup for Japan, Honda could leave CSKA Moscow this summer.

Ali Al Habsi is likely to leave Bolton. The Omani goalkeeper was loaned by Bolton to Wigan Athletic last season and helped to keep Wigan in the Premier League. Such were his performances that he was named Wigan's Player of the Season and the club wants to make him a permanent member of the roster. Bolton is asking for \$8.1 million (euro 5.6 million).

Japanese defender Yuto Nagatomo is another player about to have a loan deal made permanent. Nagatomo spent the second half of last season with Italian giants Inter from fellow Serie A club Cesena.

Suarez eyes success

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool striker Luis Suarez believes the Reds can bring silverware to Anfield next term if they maintain the form they showed during the final five months of the last campaign over a full season.

The Merseyiders enjoyed a huge surge following the appointment of Liverpool great Kenny Dalglish as manager in succession to Roy Hodgson on January and went on to take 34 points from 18 Premier League matches.

If they had maintained that ratio from the start of last season, Liverpool would have finished on 71 points, the same as second-placed Chelsea.

"I think the form we showed over the second half of the season bodes well," Suarez - a £22.8million January signing from Dutch side Ajax - told LFC Weekly.

"We've been playing well and I think we've been getting into the type of form that we know we'll have to keep up for a whole season if we want to be title contenders," the Uruguay forward added.

"This is something we're optimistic about for next season and if we can hit the ground running and maintain the good form then I think we've got a good chance of

doing well."

However Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard said the overwhelming priority was regaining a place in the top four and the spot in the Champions League that comes with finishing in English football's leading quartet.

"I'd love nothing better than to lead the lads to some silverware next year but I don't want to raise expectation by saying that will definitely happen," said the England midfielder, who sat out the final three months of last season having undergone a groin operation in early March.

"It would be stupid of me to raise expectations any more than they are already."

"Getting in the Champions League will be the main aim. I think it is for all the clubs in the Premier League."

"For financial reasons it's so important but it's also the biggest competition for players individually at club level."

"We just need to continue what we've been doing during the last six months."

"Hopefully we'll add some more players to strengthen the squad and then we need to compete," the local hero added.

"We are good enough to beat anyone on our day, we just need to find the consistency to challenge for honours."

MU snap up Jones

Football

ESPNSOCCERNET

Manchester United have confirmed the capture of England Under-21 defender Phil Jones on a five-year deal after agreeing an undisclosed fee with Blackburn Rovers.

United thought they had secured Jones' services last week, only for the transfer to be halted due to an unforeseen snag. It was claimed Blackburn were holding out for more cash and that Liverpool had jumped in with a £20 million offer.

However, Jones, who featured for England U-21's in their opening European Championship match against Spain in Denmark, apparently told Rovers he did not wish to join any other club than United.

And with the Red Devils refusing to budge beyond the figure - believed to be £16.5 million - that triggered a buyout clause in the 19-year-old's contract, Blackburn have been forced to agree a sale.

"Manchester United is delighted to announce it has signed an agreement with Blackburn Rovers for the transfer of Phil Jones," said a United statement. "The player passed a medical in Manchester last week and has agreed a five-year contract. The deal will be completed once the player returns from international duty."

A statement, released on behalf of the owners, board and manager, on the Blackburn site read: "Much as we would love him to stay on with us - and we made all efforts to convince him to stay - Phil has to finally follow his heart. We are extremely happy with his contribution to our team and we wish him all the very best in his future endeavours."

Jones played alongside fellow United youngster Chris Smalling in the heart of England's defence during the Young Lions' 1-1 draw against Spain U21's on Sunday night and the duo are expected to eventually replace centre-back pairing Rio Ferdinand and Nemanja Vidic at Old Trafford.

SPORTS POLL
WEEKLY QUESTION
Who do you think will challenge Mushqir Rahim?
Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote
Follow The Daily Star Sport on **twitter**
www.twitter.com/dssport

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Brothers v Ctg Mohammedan
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: BNS