

'No new signings'

AFP, Madrid

Spanish league leaders Real Madrid will not be looking to sign new players during the transfer window, coach Jose Mourinho said Friday.

"The market is an opportunity that is open to those who need it, but we fortunately do not need it," he said during an end of year interview with the club's television station.

"The squad has been built with much work to provide the club with the means to fight for what we are fighting for.

"For us the market is closed. I don't want any player, I have not asked for one and I am not going to ask for one."

The former Chelsea coach also said his recent comments about his desire to eventually return to the English Premier League had been misinterpreted.

During an interview with the BBC on Monday, Mourinho said he was "very, very happy" at Real but his "passion" is England and his "next step" will be to go back to the country and "if possible, go and stay for a long time."

"Get me a good club in a couple of years," the Portuguese coach added.

The comment was interpreted by some in Spain as meaning he plans to leave Real when his current four-year contract with the club expires at the end of the 2013-14 season.

"You don't translate 'a couple of years' literally, it's an expression you use in the English language to mean in a few years, not exactly two," the Portuguese coach told Real's television station when asked about the comment.

"It could be two, three, four, 20, or you never know," he added.



Liverpool star Steven Gerrard celebrates his goal against Newcastle United during their Premier League encounter at Anfield on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gerrard lifts Liverpool

REUTERS, Liverpool

Steven Gerrard's huge influence on Liverpool was clearly apparent again on Friday as he took just 31 minutes to inspire a 3-1 Premier League win over Newcastle United in his team's final fixture of the year.

Gerrard, who said he was looking forward to seeing the back of 2011 after missing several months with a groin injury and an ankle infection, was introduced as a 59th-minute substitute with the score 1-1 and Newcastle looking strong.

By the final whistle the England international had scored the third goal, provided three clear-cut chances for Andy Carroll and lifted the quality and confidence of a team that had previously won only three times at home in the league this season.

Welsh striker Craig Bellamy netted twice against his former club but so convincing was Gerrard's cameo display that the fit-again midfielder was named man of the match.

"To get on the scoresheet and get three points was a perfect return," the 31-year-old Gerrard told Sky Sports. "I have had a terrible year with a lot of injuries but I just want to look forward."

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish said: "Steven has a wee bit of mileage left in him yet. Today was a great reward for him and everybody who has helped him get back to fitness."

With 12 minutes remaining Gerrard made a well-timed run into the penalty area, and after being found by a neat Jordan Henderson pass, he slipped the ball underneath Newcastle keeper Tim Krul from a narrow angle.

It was enough to move Liverpool (34 points from 19 games) up into fifth

place before Saturday's main programme of fixtures. Newcastle (30) are seventh.

France midfielder Yohan Cabaye headed Newcastle in front after 25 minutes but Bellamy equalised four minutes later with a precise low finish from the edge of the box that went through a ruck of players.

Eight minutes after Gerrard left the bench, Daniel Agger was fouled and Bellamy bent a free kick past Krul from 25 metres.

Newcastle went close in the 70th minute when Demba Ba's improvised flick was heading for goal until Martin Skrtel raced towards his own line to pull off a dramatic clearance.

England striker Carroll, bought from Newcastle in January for a fee of 35 million pounds (\$54.39 million), had another frustrating night, fluffing one clear chance and sending a header from a Gerrard cross against the bar.

Torres' place in doubt

REUTERS, Madrid



Spain striker Fernando Torres could miss selection for next year's European championship if he does not get more playing time with Premier League club Chelsea, Spain coach Vicente Del Bosque has said.

In an interview with the Spanish sports daily As on Friday, the former Real Madrid coach said Torres's poor club form was a worry.

"There are five months until the European championship during which everything could turn around but if the situation does not change it will be hard for him," Del Bosque said.

The 27-year-old striker, who scored the goal against Germany in 2008 that won the Spanish their second European title, has netted just five times in 23 games since his January move to London from Liverpool and seven of his 12 Chelsea appearances this season have been as a substitute.

"Fernando deserves respect for his record and he has our confidence but if he is not playing, there are certain things that are obvious," Del Bosque added.

Eusebio set to leave hospital

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese football legend Eusebio is set to be released from hospital on Saturday as a spokesperson for the hospital announced on Friday.

The 69-year-old Mozambique-born superstar - who won the Ballon d'Or in 1965 and inspired Portugal to third place in the 1966 World Cup - has been in hospital since last week suffering from pneumonia.

"Eusebio da Silva Ferreira will leave hospital in the late morning of tomorrow, December 31," read a statement from Dr Joao Sa, assistant director of the Hospital de la Luz, adding that Eusebio was totally cured.

Eusebio - nicknamed the 'Black Panther' - was signed aged 19 by Benfica, and they went on to win the 1962 European Cup while he also scored 41 goals in 64 international appearances.

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DAY'S EVENT



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Abahani v Sk Jamal Dhanmondi
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Gazi Tank v Surjo Tarun
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

Mohammedan v Prime Doleshwar



Newly appointed Paris St Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti (L) and sport director Leonardo pose with a club shirt during a news conference at the Parc des Princes Stadium on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Mancini predicts close race

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City reach the midway stage of their Premier League campaign on Sunday with manager Roberto Mancini predicting the title race will go right down to the wire.

City start the weekend level on points with Manchester United but remain at the top of the table due to a superior goal difference.

Yet Mancini's expensively-assembled side, which has set the pace for most of the season, could start 2012 in second spot as City do not play Sunderland until New Year's Day - 24 hours after United have hosted bottom side Blackburn.

It is so tight that Mancini believes the title race will not be decided until the last day of the season on May 13.

And City's Italian manager says he has not set a points target for his side to win the league as the blistering starts from City, United and Tottenham, currently third in the table, make it difficult to predict how many points will be needed to be crowned champions.

"It is difficult (to predict)," said

Mancini. "In this moment City, United and Tottenham have a lot of points compared to other years.

"If you said how many points you need to win the league, it is very difficult. I think you need to wait another six or eight games."

City have seen a five-point cushion at the top disappear since the start of December after suffering their first loss of the season at Chelsea and dropping two more points against West Brom on Boxing Day.

But Mancini laughed off suggestions his players are feeling the pressure.

"We knew before West Brom it would be impossible to stay on the top (all the time) or to win the title in January," he added.

"When you play against United, Tottenham or Chelsea, this is impossible.

"We have taken 45 points and scored a lot of goals. We should fight until the end and I think this championship will be decided in the last three or four games."

City have no fresh injury worries although the fragile Owen Hargreaves remains sidelined with a knee problem.

Matt Kilgallon is set to answer Mar-

tin O'Neill's emergency call - 19 months after his last game for Sunderland.

O'Neill is ready to bring the forgotten Black Cats centre-back in from the cold in an attempt to help shackle big-spending City.

The Sunderland manager is wrestling with an injury crisis, with Titus Bramble, Michael Turner and Phil Bardsley all sidelined.

The Northern Irishman is set to turn to Kilgallon, who was frozen out by previous manager Steve Bruce soon after sealing a £1.75m move from Sheffield United just under two years ago.

Kilgallon - who established a good reputation when he started out at Leeds United - has been farmed out on loan for Middlesbrough and Doncaster, with the last of just six Sunderland starts coming in May, 2010.

The 27-year-old has yet to play any first team football this season, but with stand-in left-back Kieran Richardson also a doubt through illness, O'Neill admits he's short on defensive options.

"The absences are a major blow because we haven't got the largest squad to choose from, so it's a major concern," said O'Neill.

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