

# City look for midfielder

Football

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini may seek to bolster his squad in the transfer window but only if the club are able to offload several members of his squad first.

City are reported to be on the lookout for a midfielder with Ivory Coast star Yaya Toure set to depart Eastlands on African Cup of Nations duty.

However Mancini is adamant that any new arrivals will be dictated by whether the club is able to negotiate the departures of players such as Carlos Tevez, Nedum Onuoha and Wayne Bridge.

Tevez, who has not played for City since his bust-up with Mancini during the Champions League match against Bayern Munich in September, has been linked to a move with AC Milan with other clubs also interested in the striker.

"We need to sell three or four players and with Carlos we could close (a deal) with a club in the next three or four days, and also possibly Wayne. Then maybe we can do something," Mancini said.

"We hope for us and for Carlos we can do a deal. There are two or three teams in Italy, a team in France, and another team involved - I hope for him he can start to play football.

"We could maybe bring someone in, but we need to sell."

Although Tevez appears likely to leave, Mancini does not believe he needs to replace the striker in his squad, confident he has enough firepower left with Mario Balotelli, Edin Dzeko and Sergio Aguero backed up by attacking midfielders Samir Nasri, David Silva and Adam Johnson.

Mancini admitted he is also interested in Roma midfielder Daniele De Rossi but doubted whether the Italian would be available.

"De Rossi is a top player, like Yaya, but he plays for Roma, a top team, and he was born there. I don't know if he will leave," he said.



Newcastle United midfielder Yohan Cabaye (L) celebrates his goal with teammates during their Premier League encounter against Manchester United at St James' Park on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Suarez apology slated

AFP, London



A leading anti-racism campaigner dismissed an apology from Luis Suarez as "lamentable" on Thursday following the Liverpool

striker's eight-match ban for abusing Manchester United defender Patrice Evra.

Liverpool and Suarez have faced a storm of criticism for their defiant stance since an independent FA disciplinary panel found the Uruguayan international guilty of abusing Evra.

Liverpool confirmed earlier this week that they would not challenge the ban while Suarez said he would accept the punishment with "the resignation of someone who hasn't done anything wrong."

In a statement issued late Wednesday, Suarez apologised for causing offence and insisted he had only used the word "negro" against Evra once and not several times as it had been alleged.

"I admitted to the commission that I said a word in Spanish once and only once. I told the panel members that I will not use it again on a football pitch in England," Suarez said.

"I never, ever used this word in a derogatory way and if it offends anyone then I want to apologise for that."

However Suarez's comments were given short shrift by Herman Ouseley, the head of the FA-backed Kick It Out campaign and the former chief of Britain's Commission for Racial Equality.

"Suarez's attempt at a belated apology is nothing short of lamentable," Ouseley wrote in The Guardian.

"I cannot believe that a club of Liverpool's stature, and with how it has previously led on matters of social justice and inequality, can allow its integrity and credibility to be debased by such crass and ill-considered responses.

"Liverpool FC need to take a hard look at themselves and how they have responded to the complaint and the investigations into the allegations of abuse in the Patrice Evra/Luis Suarez case."

Meanwhile Professional Footballers Association chief Gordon Taylor told Sky Sports News that the Suarez ban sent out a strong message that authorities had a zero tolerance attitude towards racism.

"It's a lesson to all of us...that all players coming into our game from different countries understand and accept what we are about - equality and diversity," Taylor said.

"We have got probably the most multicultural game in the world so it's important to set the right example.

"We don't want him (Evra) feeling a victim. We want our black players to feel comfortable that racism can be dealt with in football terms, as well as the law of the land.

"Some issues are bigger than a player, the club or the game and racism is one of those. We have to learn from it and there should be no misunderstanding or ambiguity in the future."

# Litex hire Stoichkov

REUTERS, Sofia

Bulgarian soccer great Hristo Stoichkov was appointed coach of national champions Litex Lovech on Thursday.

The 45-year-old, who had been strongly linked to the post in recent weeks, becomes ambitious Litex owner Grisha Ganchev's 11th coach since June 2004.

Stoichkov, who has never coached a club in his native country, replaces Atanas Dzhambazki, who parted company with the Lovech-based side on Tuesday after limited success during his 71-day tenure.

"Our goal is to win the Bulgarian Cup and to play in Europe (next season)," the former Barcelona player and European Cup winner told a news conference. "And no doubt, we'll be searching for the win in every single match."

Four-times Bulgarian champions Litex are seventh in the standings at the mid-season break, 11 points behind surprise leaders Ludogorets.

# Magpies rout Man Utd

AFP, London



Newcastle sent Manchester United spinning to their second consecutive Premier League defeat on Wednesday to give Manchester City a vital edge in the title race.

Goals from Demba Ba, Yohan Cabaye and a late Phil Jones own goal clinched a deserved 3-0 victory for Newcastle at St James Park, as United missed the chance to go level on points with City at the top of the table.

The defeat means United, beaten by Blackburn at Old Trafford in their last outing at the weekend, now trail City by three points after the league leaders downed Liverpool 3-0 at Eastlands on Tuesday.

An end-to-end first half saw both sides threaten early on, with Manchester United striker Dimitar Berbatov grazing the post with a header on 15 minutes to set alarm bells ringing in the Newcastle defence.

At the other end, Newcastle had strong appeals for a penalty turned down by referee Howard Webb after Rio Ferdinand brought down Ba as the two players tussled for possession.

The deadlock was broken on 33 minutes when Newcastle's readiness to play route one football paid dividends.

A long kick upfield by Newcastle keeper Tim Krul was met by Shola Ameobi, who flicked on for Ba, who in turn hooked a superb volley into the side netting beyond Anders Lindegaard, favoured in goal ahead of the dropped David De Gea.

Ba's strength and mobility continued to cause prob-

lems for United and it was a foul on the striker by Jones early in the second half that led to Newcastle's second.

From the ensuing free-kick Cabaye stepped up and struck a powerful curling effort into the top corner beyond the despairing dive of Lindegaard.

Newcastle's second stung United into action, and only a magnificent goal-line clearance from Danny Simpson prevented Wayne Rooney from pulling a goal back for the visitors on 59 minutes.

Rooney, who had missed the Blackburn defeat after being dropped by Ferguson for disciplinary reasons, endured a miserable evening and eventually suffered the indignity of being substituted with 15 minutes to go.

A bad night for United got worse in the dying minutes when a long punt forward by Krul caused confusion in the visiting defence and Jones steered a header past Lindegaard for 3-0.

In the night's other game, Bolton moved off the bottom after coming from behind to beat Everton 2-1 at Goodison Park.

Everton goalkeeper Tim Howard opened the scoring with a freak effort before Bolton hit back with goals from David Ngog and Gary Cahill.

Howard's 63rd minute effort came when the Everton goalkeeper's long clearance bounced over the head of Bolton keeper Adam Bogdan and flew into the net.

But Bolton responded almost immediately, with David Ngog beating John Heitinga and curling a left-footed shot into the far corner.

Cahill -- expected to join Chelsea later this month -- then drove in the winner for a vital three points for Bolton.

RESULTS	
Everton 1 (Howard 63)	Bolton 2 (Ngog 67, Cahill 78)
Newcastle 3 (Ba 33, Cabaye 47, Jones 90-og)	Man Utd 0

# Carlo denies Kaka, Pato rumours

AFP, Dubai

New Paris Saint-Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti has played down speculation linking his side with moves for Real Madrid playmaker Kaka and AC Milan striker Alexandre Pato.

On Tuesday, a source close to PSG owners Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) told AFP that the club had set aside 61.5 million euros (\$80m) to recruit both Brazilians, but Ancelotti said the Ligue 1 leaders had not made approaches for either player.

"Pato is a Milan player," said the Italian, who previously worked with both players during his time as Milan coach.

On Kaka, he added: "At the moment, there is no chance of signing him. There's a transfer window and we'll speak to the club about improving the team."

"I don't want to talk about individuals like Pato or Kaka, who are under contract. We'll be working to buy some players, but in order to recruit, clubs must be willing to sell."

Ancelotti tasted defeat in his first game in charge on Wednesday, as a goal from Pato condemned PSG to a 1-0 loss against Milan in a mid-season friendly in Dubai.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi (C) scores one of his two goals against Osasuna during their Spanish Cup tie at Nou Camp Nou on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Barca crush Osasuna

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Lionel Messi and Cesc Fabregas each scored twice as Barcelona thrilled the Nou Camp with a crushing 4-0 win over Osasuna in their King's Cup last 16 first leg on Wednesday.

The Spanish, European and world champions completely dominated their La Liga rivals, victory made all the sweeter when talisman Messi came off the bench to add two goals to first-half strikes from the former Arsenal captain.

Barca had said Messi would miss the game with flu but the Argentine World Player of the Year was able to replace Pedro for the final half hour against an outclassed Osasuna.

Fabregas, who was at Barca's youth school with Messi before moving to London, put the home side ahead in the 13th minute.

He doubled their lead five minutes later with a fine piece of close control and a sublime chip over goalkeeper Asier Riesgo.

The 24-year-old Fabregas has been in blistering form since returning to the Catalan capital in the close season and thriving in the more advanced role he has been given by coach Pep Guardiola.

Messi netted a rare header from a Fabregas cross 20 minutes from time before picking up a pass from the influential Xavi in added time and curling a shot into the corner of the net.

"I didn't vomit and there was no fever, I just had a stomach ache, nothing more," Messi said in a television interview. "That's why I couldn't take part in this morning's training but later on I recovered enough to be able to play."

Barring upsets in next week's second legs, Barca face a quarterfinal clash with bitter rivals Real Madrid, who beat them 1-0 in last year's final.

Jose Mourinho's side came back from two goals down to win their last 16 first leg against Malaga 3-2 on Tuesday.

Real Sociedad, King's Cup winners in 1987, took the upper hand against Real Mallorca when they beat the 2003 champions 2-0 at their Anoeta stadium in San Sebastian earlier on Wednesday.

SPORTS POLL  
WEEKLY QUESTION  
What was your favourite memory of 2011?

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STAR Cricket

Australia v India

Second Test, Day 5

Live from 5:30am (Saturday)

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Sri Lanka

Third Test, Day 4

DAY'S EVENT



Fed Cup Football

Muktijoddha v BJMC

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Mohammedan v Cox City

Venue: Kamalapur Stadium

Both matches start at 3:00pm

Practice Match

Bangladesh A v England Lions

Venue: Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury