



# Devilish duo charms Dhaka

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

For a while, Dwight Yorke's infectious smile almost made you forget that this was a corporate event full of the usual suspects. The Trinidad and Tobago striker made all the right moves; opening his speech by reminding the gathered press that West Indies legend Brian Lara was his best friend. Later, he took to the field with a team full of underprivileged children and also managed to score much to the delight of the few hundred spectators who had gathered in the dustbowl of the Banani Society field which was swimming in the colours of the Red Devils.

But the truth is that Yorke and his club mate, the legendary Bryan Robson are here on official business, at the behest of telecommunication giant Airtel, whose tie-up with Manchester United meant that they managed to extract two of the clubs more famous ambassadors along with the coveted 19th Premier League title to make the trip down to Dhaka to promote the launching of exclusive Manchester United relevant content to all Airtel subscribers in the country.

But hopefully this is only the beginning, and as Airtel CEO Chris Tobit said during the Q&A session, the culmination of the partnership might be a visit of Manchester United to the country in the not too distant future.

Judging by the enthusiasm shown by the gathered members of the 'official' Manchester United fan club, that visit would be received with open arms by supporters, both of the club and football in general.

At yesterday's press release the hype train was in full flow, with tailored videos reminding everyone that Manchester United had 333 million fans worldwide. For the sake of perspective, if these fans were all part of the same country, it would make it the third most populous nation in the world.

The appeal of the Red Devils from Manchester stretch far and wide but even as ambassadors, Yorke and Robson will have found themselves in more popular locations than Dhaka. Both were in good form when given the chance to speak with Robson opening with a typical wisecrack about the British weather.

"I don't usually wear sunglasses like

Yorke here, 'cause in England you hardly ever need them."

As an ice-breaker it worked perfectly and he fielded the rest of the questions with aplomb, particularly one from left-field about whether he would like to take up the chance to fill the currently vacant slot of Bangladesh manager.

"Management gave me grey hairs!" exclaimed Robson. "I have been [in management] for a long time, and only recently quit my post as Thailand manager where I had an absolutely fantastic time," he continued. "Truth is, I don't fancy going back into club management again, but international management perhaps. At the moment though, I can only thank you for the offer and say that this club ambassador role [at Manchester United] is more suited to my pace."

Like Yorke, he too was quick to jump on the cricket bandwagon and offered an interesting tidbit about his own experiences.

"In the mid-80's I once shared a century stand with the great Clive Lloyd. I can still say I got all fourteen of those runs, while Clive got the other 86." Both Yorke and Robson thanked the sponsors for their support and expressed their delight at the turnout and interest in football in the country.

At the end of the long morning they shared in the aforementioned ten-minute game with children from Jaago, a school for underprivileged kids, where Robson's tumble on the patchy turf and own-goal and Yorke's legitimate one drew the most cheers.



Manchester United legend Dwight Yorke (C) plays football with the underprivileged kids of Jaago at the Banani Society field yesterday. (Below) Yorke holds the 19th Premier League trophy with fellow Red Devils legend Bryan Robson.

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Fan club adds lustre

Football

SAVEEM SHAMA

With Manchester United legends Dwight Yorke and Bryan Robson grab-

bing all the possible attention around the Banani Society field, the booth of the "Manchester United Fans-Bangladesh" tucked around the edge hardly drew too much attention, but added much to the gala feel of the event.

Manchester United Fans-Bangladesh started as a mere Facebook group in December 2007, with the aim to unite all supporters of the Red Devils in the country together in one group. But little did creator Neon Tahidul Islam expect that it would bear fruit in such remarkable circumstances.

In the four years since its creation, the group has expanded to have more than 2000 members and proudly claims to hold the highest number of Manchester United fans in it among all the other similar existing groups on Facebook.

But when Airtel set up the event with the United legends and the Premiership trophy, the powers-that-be got in touch with the group to allow them to

set up a booth at the Banani Society Field as part of the arrangement for the legends, informed Abir, one of the group administrators.

The young group did an energetic job, decking the stall with Manchester United jerseys which was later signed by both Yorke and Robson. They gave something back to the legends as well, handing over replica rickshaw memorabilia to the ex-Manchester United players.

Neon in particular was ecstatic at the event.

"Although we only have a Facebook group up till now, we want to grow and make our own website soon," he said.

"Our objective is to become an officially recognized fan club of Manchester United. The Red Devils have fan clubs in 26 countries but unfortunately Bangladesh is not one of them," he said.

It is a fact that this energetic group of youths are aiming to remedy quite soon.

## Pepe let off the hook

AFP, Madrid

Spain's football authority cautioned Real Madrid defender Pepe on Monday after he stamped on the hand of Barcelona's striker Lionel Messi in a cup clash last week.

The Royal Spanish Football Federation named Pepe on its list of players sanctioned for dangerous play in the King's Cup quarterfinals, along with three other Real players and Gerard Pique of Barcelona.

Television images of the January 18 clash showed Pepe walking towards the referee, glancing down quickly at Messi, who was lying on the ground, and then stamping on his left hand with his boot.

The Portuguese defender apologised saying the stamp was accidental, fuelling criticism in the press which considered the apology unconvincing.

Real lost the first-leg cup match 2-1 at home and travel to Barcelona on Wednesday for the second leg. They sit five points clear of Barcelona at the top of the Spanish league.

# Harry's secret account No Wenger rift: Van Persie

Football

AFP, London

Tottenham manager Harry Redknapp concealed the existence of an offshore bank account from British authorities for six years until he was arrested as part of a tax probe, a court heard Tuesday.

Redknapp, who is on trial at Southwark Crown Court on charges of tax evasion, is alleged to have opened a bank account in Monaco in 2002 under the code name "Rosie 47" after his pet English bulldog.

Prosecutors allege that the account was used by Redknapp to receive illicit payments from his co-defendant Milan Mandaric, the former chairman of Portsmouth Football Club, in lieu of commission on a transfer deal.

Prosecutor John Black told the court on Tuesday that Redknapp had been "feigning almost complete ignorance" of the Monaco account's existence.

While Redknapp had notified investigators of the bank account during a Premier League anti-corruption investigation in 2006, he had not notified tax authorities until after his arrest in 2008, Black said. Wrapping up his opening statement on the second day of Redknapp's trial, Black asked jurors to consider whether "is it the case that Mr Redknapp could be unaware of the bank account."

"The existence of the bank account was not registered to Revenue and Customs for a period of six years, two months... after Mr Redknapp was first arrested and questioned in the course of this investigation," he said.

AFP, London



Robin van Persie has dismissed talk of a rift with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger following the striker's reaction to the substitution of Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain against Manchester United.

Van Persie, a pivotal figure for Arsenal this season as they attempt to qualify for the Champions League, appeared to exclaim "No!" when Wenger replaced Oxlade-Chamberlain with Andrey Arshavin during Sunday's 2-1 defeat.

The decision was hugely unpopular with Arsenal's fans, who roundly jeered

Wenger following the move.

Holland striker van Persie however has moved quickly to play down suggestions of a split with Wenger, saying in a statement on his Facebook page on Tuesday that Oxlade-Chamberlain had been replaced because of a calf injury.

"I was not having a go at the boss on Sunday - I was just sad to see Alex leave the pitch as he just gave the assist for our only goal," van Persie said.

"I was not questioning his judgement - I know it's not my place to challenge what Arsene Wenger does. He is the boss, he makes the decisions and that's it, end of story."

"Alex-Oxlade Chamberlain had a calf injury. We did not know that but the boss

did and brought Andrey Arshavin on."

Van Persie added: "I have a lot of respect and admiration for Arsene Wenger. He is one of the best football coaches in the world, with a brilliant record of success here at Arsenal. I wouldn't be here or the player I am without him."

"The manager and I are fine and my relationship with the club is good. I don't want anyone misunderstanding the situation here for a moment. "There is no problem, there is no conflict, and there is no controversy. The boss knows that, I know that, the players all know that."

"But it's important the Arsenal fans know that and that people in the game know that."

## Lucas back at L'pool

AFP, Liverpool

Midfielder Lucas Leiva has returned to Liverpool from his native Brazil to continue his rehabilitation from a season-ending knee injury.

The 25-year-old underwent surgery to repair the anterior cruciate ligament damage suffered in the League Cup quarter-final win at Chelsea in November.

Lucas told the club's website, www.liverpoolfc.tv: "I am still a long way away, but the knee is getting better and the rehab is going well."

"I have to make sure I complete a perfect rehab and be back as soon as possible."

"The next stage is to get the knee moving and in the next few weeks I'll start to walk again."

"Hopefully in a month's time I'll start in the gym and my programme and be able to work with weights."

"When you're on crutches you cannot do too much, so I can't wait to start my programme and get in the swimming pool and things like that."

"The physios and the doctors have told me the rehab is going well and progressing well."

## Balotelli faces 4-match ban

AFP, Manchester



Manchester City look set to accept Mario Balotelli's four-match ban after the volatile striker was charged for stamping on Scott Parker during Sunday's defeat of Tottenham.

City assistant manager David Platt dropped a strong hint on Tuesday that the club were unlikely to lodge an appeal for Balotelli but stressed a final decision had not yet been taken.

The Premier League leaders have until 1800 GMT on Wednesday to decide whether or not to contest Balotelli's charges following the Italian's clash with Parker during Sunday's 3-2 win at Eastlands.

However Platt acknowledged the video footage of the incident did not "look good" and spoke of the "futility" of some appeals.

"We are likely to be without a player for four games," Platt said ahead of City's crunch League Cup semi-final second leg with Liverpool.

Balotelli will miss Wednesday's League Cup game if City accept the ban but could play if the club choose to appeal.

However any appeal would carry the risk of an increased ban at a crucial point in the season.

Platt suggested City's decision might be influenced by their failure to overturn Vincent Kompany's four-match ban earlier this month after he was controversially sent off against Manchester United in the FA Cup.

"I don't think anybody thought we would win an appeal with Vincent Kompany, even though the majority of people didn't feel he deserved a red card or a four-match ban. It shows the futility of an appeal sometimes," Platt said.

"This looks poor when you slow it down," he added, referring to Balotelli's incident.

## Mourinho wants to leave?

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho is fed up with bad relations in the dressing room and repeated losses to Barcelona and wants to leave at the end of the season, the sporting press said Tuesday.

"Mourinho has let it be known to the people around him that he would like to leave before June 30," said the front-page headline of Madrid-based sports daily AS.

On the same page, displayed alongside a photo of a grumpy looking Mourinho in black tracksuit, the paper added: "Mr Indispensable becomes Mr Mysterious."

Barcelona-based daily Mundo Deportivo said the story that emerged of Mourinho's possible exit at the end of the season would not be his first such threat.

Mourinho used the same tactic to convince the club to give him an extra striker last season, Mundo Deportivo said.

According to AS, Mourinho met after Real Madrid's victory over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday with Real Madrid president Florentino Perez and managing director Jose Angel Sanchez.

"The Portuguese told those close to him that at the end of the season he is going, whatever happens," the paper said.

According to AS, Mourinho was fed up with the whistles he received from fans in the Bernabeu despite Madrid's victory, a split with the team and his treatment by the Spanish press.

The paper even interpreted Mourinho's dress sense as a sign of departure, saying he had eschewed Madrid's official clothing in favour of attire by his personal sponsor Porsche, "a brand that is a direct competitor with Real Madrid sponsor Audi."

Clouds have gathered over the team since their 1-2 home loss to Barcelona in the Spanish Cup quarterfinals last week, their third loss in four matches with Barcelona this season.

"At the moment, we're leaders with a five-point lead on



Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho addresses a press conference in Madrid on Tuesday on the eve of their Spanish Cup match against Barcelona.

PHOTO: AFP

the team everyone says are the best in the world," Mourinho said, speaking ahead of Wednesday's quarterfinal return leg against Barca.

"Before I arrived here, the club was used to being knocked out of the King's Cup by teams from a lower division, and we won the competition last season."

"And then we won six games out of six in the Champions League. So I think we haven't got as many problems as people want to say."

On Sunday, the biggest selling daily Marca said Mourinho berated his team for their attitude after the loss to Barcelona, further raising tensions with players.



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Fourth Test, Day 3  
Live from 6:00am (Thursday)  
**TEN Cricket**  
England v Pakistan  
Second Test, Day 1  
Live from 12:00pm  
**TEN Action+**  
Carling Cup  
Liverpool v Man City  
Second Semifinal  
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Venue: BKSP-2