

Meningitis scare for Sturridge

REUTERS, London

Chelsea striker Daniel Sturridge is optimistic about his chances of playing for Britain at the Olympics after being treated for viral meningitis in hospital, he said on Wednesday.

Sturridge, named in the 18-man Team GB squad by coach Stuart Pearce on Monday, remains in London's St Mary's Hospital after he fell ill at the weekend and was admitted for tests.

"I am starting to feel a lot better and I am optimistic about being able to make the Olympics," the 22-year-old said in a statement.

"The Chelsea medical team have been closely monitoring everything and they and the doctors and nurses at St Mary's Hospital have been outstanding throughout."

Chelsea manager Roberto Di Matteo echoed Sturridge's optimism at his first news conference ahead of the new Premier League season which kicks off on Aug. 18.

"Daniel has viral meningitis. I spoke to him and he feels better now. Hopefully he gets well as soon as possible," Di Matteo told reporters.

"He felt unwell over the weekend and was taken to hospital afterwards."

"I think it's difficult to give a time limit (on his recovery) today. We will monitor him on a daily basis."

"The fact he's feeling better is positive. I'm optimistic he'll recover and he'll be able to join the Olympic team."

Pearce's Britain team has already been dealt a blow with Tottenham Hotspur's Wales winger Gareth Bale already out of contention with back and hip complaints.

Sturridge missed out on England's Euro 2012 campaign and is a key member of the squad for Pearce who controversially opted not to select former England captain David Beckham.

The squad will link up ahead of the Games for a training camp next weekend in Loughborough, Leicestershire.

Team GB play Senegal in their first fixture on July 26, before facing United Arab



Barcelona's latest signing left back Jordi Alba gives the thumbs up as he poses for photographers at Nou Camp yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

MU play for dollars

AFP, New York

Storied British football club Manchester United, overloaded with debt since their takeover by a billionaire American family of investors, is moving to raise cash through a US share sale.

The US-controlled Red Devils, Britain's all-time top team, filed papers in the United States on Tuesday for an initial public share offering, with the owners touting its value as one of the world's most recognized sports brands.

The papers gave a pro-forma amount of \$100 million as the target for the share issue, but recent reports about abortive attempts to list it in Hong Kong or Singapore said the owners aim to bring in \$1 billion.

The team, controlled since 2005 by the Glazer family -- billionaire US sports investors -- has struggled in recent years with heavy debts from the takeover despite what is arguably the world's strongest global fan base for a football club.

"We intend to use all of our net proceeds from this offering to reduce our indebtedness," the IPO prospectus said.

United fans mounted protests against the Glazers from the moment the Americans bought the Premier League club in 2005, loading it up with debt to finance the deal.

Tensions over their management and finances hit a peak in 2010, when the club's liabilities topped one billion pounds (\$1.55 billion) and fans rebelled at their management, launching protests aimed at denying the club revenues.

But the debts have been slashed in the past two years, and profits have grown despite the team's narrow loss of the Premier League title to cross-town rival Manchester City this year.

The club's name and fame underpin

massive stored value that the owners hope will bring in strong support for the IPO.

"We believe that we are one of the world's most recognizable global brands with a community of 659 million followers," the prospectus said.

"The global sports industry is expected to grow from \$119 billion in 2011 to \$145 billion by 2015. Manchester United is at the forefront of live football, which is a key component of this market."

"While our business represents only a small portion of our addressable markets and may not grow at corresponding rates, we believe our global reach and access to emerging markets positions us for continued growth," it added.

The prospectus said that as of March 31, liabilities were down to 606 million pounds and debt was 423 billion pounds, and profits for the nine months to March 31 were 38 million pounds, nearly triple a year earlier.

The listed company would be the newly-created Manchester United Ltd, established in April this year in the tax haven of Cayman Islands.

Manchester United is wholly controlled by Red Football LLC, a Glazer-led company registered in the US state of Delaware, which manages the team through British-incorporated Red Football Shareholder Ltd.

Before the offering goes ahead, Red Football Shareholder will be injected into the Cayman unit, and the business of the team "will be conducted through Manchester United Ltd. and its subsidiaries," the prospectus said.

The listing is unlikely to water down the Glazers' control. According to the prospectus, their Red Football LLC holds 100 percent of class A shares and 100 percent of class B shares in the Cayman unit to be listed.

Ancelotti aims high

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain coach Carlo Ancelotti knows that only first place will do as he prepares for his first full season in charge of the Ligue 1 giants.

PSG finished second behind Montpellier last season, despite lying top of the table when Italian Ancelotti was appointed midway through the campaign.

As the capital club's mega-rich Qatari owners are prepared to invest huge sums in the transfer market once again, PSG are likely to have by far the strongest squad in the French game by the time the Ligue 1 season starts on August 10.

With that in mind, Ancelotti is aiming high, although he insists that his side will not have it easy.

"We came second last season so naturally the objective is to finish in first place," he said at a press conference at PSG's Camp des Loges training base in the western suburbs of Paris.

"It will be a competitive championship. We also have the Champions League to look forward to and it may be that we treat that with the same level of importance as the league itself."

"But it will be easier to win the Ligue 1 title than the Champions League."

PSG will go straight into the Champions League group stages for what will be their first appearance in Europe's top club competition since 2004/05, when they finished last in a group containing Porto, Chelsea and CSKA Moscow.

As they chase success on multiple fronts, PSG completed their first signing of the summer on Monday in the shape of Argentine international attacker Ezequiel Lavezzi.

The 27-year-old joined from Napoli on a four-year deal for a fee believed to be in the region of 30 million euros

Germany under fire

REUTERS, Berlin



Germany's national soccer players, still reeling from a 2-1 defeat to Italy in last week's Euro 2012 semifinal, are now being accused of being unpatriotic after failing to sing the national anthem.

Most of the Germany team stood in silence as the strains of the anthem wafted through the stadium in Warsaw last Thursday, in contrast to Italy's squad who sang their anthem with gusto.

"It is right and proper that players sing along when the national anthem is performed. They play for the German national team and not for themselves," the state premier of Hesse, Volker Bouffier, told the top-selling daily Bild.

Bavaria's premier Joachim Herrmann said: "The German national anthem belongs to international matches and to the national squad. If somebody cannot be bothered to sing it, he should stay in his local club."

In Germany, the federal states decide whether children learn the national anthem at school. In conservative Bavaria it is compulsory, for example, while in Berlin it depends on the choice of individual teacher.

"After two dictatorships that violated German symbols and patriotism, many people have trouble dealing with the national anthem," said historian Paul Nolte.

The music for Germany's national anthem was composed by Joseph Haydn in 1797 and the German poet August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben wrote the lyrics of "Das Lied der Deutschen" to Haydn's melody in 1841.

The song is perhaps best known for the opening words of the first stanza, "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" (literally, "Germany, Germany above all") which was dropped after the Nazi era.

Today, when they sing their national anthem Germans sing only the third stanza, which begins: "Unity and law and freedom for the German fatherland".

Brazil slump to record low

REUTERS, Berne

Brazil slumped to 11th in the FIFA rankings on Wednesday, their lowest ever position, while tiny Tahiti surged 41 places after their astonishing win at the Oceania Nations Cup.

Performances at Euro 2012 had an impact on places, with winners Spain staying top, semifinalists Germany moving up a spot to second and runners-up Italy jumped from 12th to sixth.

Moving in the opposite direction, Netherlands slumped from fourth to eighth after their first-round exit at Euro 2012.

Brazil dropped out of the top 10 for the first time since the rankings began in 1993 following defeats to Mexico and Argentina in friendlies in the last month.

Uruguay remained the highest-ranked South American side at third followed by Argentina in seventh. Africa's highest team are Ivory Coast in 16th.

Tahiti's shock win at the Oceania Nations Cup lifted them 41 places to 138th though they are still short of their record 111th ranking they achieved in 2002.

RANKINGS

1. Spain
2. Germany (+1)
3. Uruguay (-1)
4. England (+2)
5. Portugal (+5)
6. Italy (+6)
7. Argentina
8. Netherlands (-4)
9. Croatia (-1)
10. Denmark (-1)
11. Brazil (-6)
12. Greece (+3)
13. Russia

Baptista out for 4 months

REUTERS, Madrid

Malaga's Brazilian forward Julio Baptista will be out of action for four months after surgery on the Achilles tendon in his right leg, the Spanish club said on Tuesday.

The 30-year-old former Arsenal and Real Madrid player missed most of last season with injury problems, making only four league appearances before having surgery on his right foot in December.

The Brazil international will be sidelined for the start of the new campaign when big-spending Malaga set out on their first venture into the Champions League.

Malaga, who are owned by a member of the Qatar royal family, finished fourth



Bayern Munich's new midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri warms up during the team's first training session in Munich on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Shot at redemption

REUTERS, London



Andre Villas-Boas was given a chance to make amends for his first failed effort in English football management after being named coach of Tottenham Hotspur on Tuesday.

The job represents a golden opportunity for Villas-Boas. A year ago he took over at London rivals Chelsea on a three-year deal but he struggled at Stamford Bridge and left under a cloud nine months later amid media reports of dressing-room unrest.

"Tottenham Hotspur are a great club with a strong tradition and fantastic support, both at home and throughout the world. I feel privileged to become coach," the 34-year-old told the Spurs website (www.tottenhamhotspur.com).

"This is one of the most exciting coaching positions in the Premier League. I have had several discussions with the chairman (Daniel Levy) and the board and I share their vision for the future progress of the club."

"This is a squad any coach would love to work with and together I believe we can bring success in the seasons ahead," the Portuguese added after replacing Harry Redknapp who was sacked last month after four years at the helm.

Hopes were initially high for Villas-Boas at Stamford Bridge after he guided Porto to Europa League glory and a Portuguese domestic double the previous season.

However, he was sacked in March after the 2009-10 Premier League champions suffered a string of poor results.

His number two Roberto Di Matteo took over in a caretaker capacity and sparked a remarkable turnaround in fortunes that led to Chelsea winning the Champions League

and FA Cup.

Tottenham removed the popular Redknapp after finishing fourth in the league but failing to qualify for Europe's top competition thanks to Chelsea's victory over Bayern Munich in the Champions League final.

It was a frustrating season for Spurs who, at the halfway stage in the league, had mounted a credible title challenge.

Redknapp's dismissal has cleared the way for Villas-Boas to return to the spotlight and while his appointment will be met with scepticism elsewhere in London, his past triumphs cannot be overlooked.

"He has an outstanding reputation for his technical knowledge of the game and for creating well-organised teams capable of playing football in an attractive and attacking style," said Levy.

"Andre shares our long-term ambitions and ethos of developing players and nurturing young talent."

Redknapp was an old-school manager type and Levy now seems to want to create an image of Spurs as a modern, high-flying, big-spending football club.

"We are constantly looking to move the club forward," he said on Tuesday.

"It is important we now look to develop potential within the squads at all levels while strengthening the first team in the summer in key positions with players who will become part of the future success of the club."

Villas-Boas brings with him two members of his backroom staff - fitness coach Jose Mario Rocha and Daniel Sousa, head of opposition scouting.

Second chances for rookie coaches are uncommon in top flight football, particularly in what is one of the toughest domestic leagues in the world.

SPORTS POLL

WEEKLY QUESTION

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Premier Div Hockey

Sonali Bank v Bangladesh SC

Time: 2:30pm

Abahani v Police AC

Time: 4:15pm

Venue: Maulana Bhasani National