

BALOTELLI, MANCINI

in training bust-up

THE GUARDIAN

Mario Balotelli and Roberto Mancini were involved in a physical confrontation at Manchester City's training ground in an incident believed to have been provoked by a bad tackle on team-mate Scott Sinclair.

Sources said the 22-year-old striker clashed with his manager in front of team-mates at their Carrington base while the squad prepared for their FA Cup third round match against Watford.

A witness told the Manchester Evening News how the pair had confronted each other during a practice match, when Balotelli reacted badly to being told off for mis-timing a challenge.

The source said: "Mancini ran at him - he was furious. He grabbed hold of him and appeared to try and

throw him on the floor. It looked like Mario was too strong and he couldn't get him down. Then all the coaches ran in to separate them but Mancini was having none of it. He kept trying to break free and have a go at him again."

The witness said Balotelli went straight to the dressing room and drove away less than ten minutes later.

The incident is certain to revive speculation over Balotelli's future, despite Mancini having repeatedly rejected the idea of selling him during the January transfer window.

Mancini told Gazzetta dello Sport at the end of last month: "I think Mario will stay but the future depends mostly on him... The relationship between me and him is always good, even if one day he does something."



PHOTO: INTERNET
Manchester City manager Roberto Mancini (L) and striker Mario Balotelli were involved in a confrontation at the club's training ground yesterday.

Joe joining West Ham

AFP, London

Liverpool midfielder Joe Cole was on Thursday having a medical examination at West Ham United with a view to rejoining the club where he began his career, according to Britain's Press Association.

Cole has failed to impose himself since arriving at Anfield from Chelsea in 2010, starting just nine Premier League games and spending last season on loan at French side Lille.

Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers does not seem pressed to find a place for Cole in his first team, prompting the 31-year-old to seek a return to West Ham, with whom he made his professional debut in 1999.

West Ham hope to complete the transfer in time for Cole to feature in Saturday's FA Cup third-round clash at home to Manchester United.

Liverpool's willingness to cancel the England international's contract means West Ham will not have to pay a transfer fee.

Blues open Ba talks

AFP, London

Chelsea have been given permission to approach Newcastle United striker Demba Ba after making an offer that triggered a release clause in his contract, Newcastle confirmed on Wednesday.

Chelsea can now open talks with the 27-year-old Senegal striker after meeting the £7 million (\$11.4 million, 8.6 million euros) asking price stipulated in his contract.

Ba, who joined Newcastle in 2011, was subsequently withdrawn from manager Alan Pardew's squad for the 2-1 Premier League loss at home to Everton on Wednesday evening.

"Newcastle United can confirm that Chelsea Football Club has made an official offer for Demba Ba which has triggered the release clause in the player's contract," Newcastle said in a statement.

"The club has given the player permission to speak to Chelsea FC and therefore he will not be included in the squad for tonight's (Wednesday's) game against Everton."

Although Chelsea are yet to conclude a deal for Ba, Pardew expects the transfer to be completed shortly.

"It's done. He will go to Chelsea with our blessing," Pardew told Sky Sports, shortly before kick-off in the game against

Everton.

"He has done fantastic for us and it's not a bad thing, all the uncertainty is now done and we can move on."

"This club is bigger than any player for sure."

Chelsea interim manager Rafael Benitez refused to confirm his club's approach for Ba, but he did concede the European champions were in need of extra options up front.

"I have not spoken with our people so don't know the situation regarding Demba Ba," said the Spaniard, shortly after his side's shock 1-0 loss at home to bottom club Queens Park Rangers.

"Fernando Torres has been playing every game and you could see he was tired."

Ba has been a major success at St James' Park, scoring 16 league goals in his debut season and taking his total for the current campaign to 13 with a brace in the 7-3 loss at Arsenal on Saturday.

The Senegalese frontman made his name during a prolific four-year spell with German club Hoffenheim and joined English side West Ham United in January 2011 after a proposed move to Stoke City collapsed due to a failed medical examination.

He scored seven goals in 12 games for West Ham but left to join Newcastle after the London club were relegated at the end of the 2010-11 season.

Juve after Llorente

REUTERS, Madrid

Italian champions Juventus have informed Athletic Bilbao that they will start talks with the La Liga club's Spain striker Fernando Llorente with a view to signing him, Bilbao said on Thursday.

"Juventus Football Club informed Athletic Club on January 3 that, knowing Fernando Llorente will end his stint at our club on June 30, 2013, they will begin negotiations with the player to incorporate him into their squad," Bilbao said in a statement on their website.

A product of their youth academy, the Pamplona-born 27-year-old made his debut for the first team in 2005 and has scored 115 goals in 317 appearances over nine seasons.

He has a market value of 30 million euros (\$39.7 million), according to transfermarkt.com, which tracks deals for soccer players.

Reds snap up Sturridge

AFP, London

Liverpool announced on Wednesday that they have completed a deal to sign England international forward Daniel Sturridge from Chelsea on a long-term contract.

The 23-year-old joined Chelsea from Manchester City in 2009 but was unable to impose himself at Stamford Bridge and has been predominantly used as a substitute this season.

"I am humbled and happy to be here," Sturridge told the Liverpool website.

"(Liverpool manager) Brendan Rodgers said he sees me here for a long time, and I also see myself here for a long time. I've not signed here to play for a couple of years and then move on."

"I've signed to be here for as long as possible. It's a humongous club -- for me, one of the biggest in the world -- and to have the fans and world-class players we have here is amazing."

Speaking after his side's 3-0 win at home to Sunderland on Wednesday, Rodgers said he was excited about adding Sturridge to his squad.

"I have known Daniel since he was 12 at Coventry and then coming through the ranks at Man City. He can score, he has pace and power," said Rodgers.

Sturridge, who will wear the number 15 shirt for the Anfield club, is Liverpool's first signing of the January transfer window and is reported to have cost around £12 million (\$19.6 million, 14.8 million euros).

He made his England debut against Sweden in November 2011 and has since made three further international appearances.

Depression a problem

AFP, London

Over three-quarters of professional footballers in England and Scotland believe depression is a problem in the sport, according to a survey published in British magazine FourFourTwo on Wednesday.

The survey of 100 players, undertaken just over a year after the apparent suicide of Wales manager Gary Speed, who suffered from depression, suggested the illness is more widespread in professional football than previously thought.

An unnamed League One (third-tier) player told the magazine: "It can affect a lot of players. I know because I have been there."

"The easy route was to give up the game completely -- I was in a dark place."

The chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), Gordon Taylor, said his organisation was putting systems in place to tackle depression.

What to WATCH

TEN Cricket

South Africa v New Zealand

First Test, Day 3

Live from 2:30pm

STAR Cricket

Australia v Sri Lanka

Third Test, Day 3

Live from 5:30am (Saturday)

STAR Sports

Primera Liga

Real Zaragoza v Real Betis

Live from 2:30am (Saturday)

TEN Sports

Brisbane Int'l

Semifinals

Live from 3:00pm

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh Cricket League

(Four-day match, Day-3)

Walton Central Zone v BCB North Zone

Time: 9:15am

Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra

Islami Bank East Zone v Prime Bank South Zone

Time: 9:15am

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

Bangladesh Premier League

Arambagh v Sk Russel

Time: 4:30pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National

Shaun stabs Chelsea

AFP, London

Chelsea old boy Shaun Wright-Phillips stunned his former club with a 78th-minute winner as bottom club Queens Park Rangers shocked the European champions 1-0 in the Premier League on Wednesday.

The 31-year-old drove home from the edge of the box to move Harry Redknapp's side to within five points of safety and prevent Chelsea from reclaiming third place from Tottenham Hotspur.

German winger Marko Marin made his first league start for Chelsea but his only contribution of note was an ugly fourth-minute challenge on Stephane Mbia for which he was lucky to escape with only a caution.

Marin did tee up Victor Moses to shoot wide from close range early in the second half, while Julio Cesar saved brilliantly from Fernando Torres and Frank Lampard had a goal ruled out for offside, but Chelsea were below-par.

Punishment arrived with 12 minutes to play, when Adel Taarabt teed up Wright-Phillips to find the bottom-left corner from 20 yards and bring Chelsea's four-game winning run to a juddering halt.

Meanwhile, Everton bolstered their bid for Champions League football by coming from behind to win 2-1 at Newcastle.

Papiss Cisse headed the hosts into a second-minute lead after goalkeeper Tim Krul's long kick was allowed to bounce on the edge of the visitors' box.

Leighton Baines produced a goal-of-the-season contender to equalise, however, rippling the net with a magnificent 30-yard free-kick that left Krul grasping at thin air.

Substitute Victor Anichebe completed the comeback on the hour, tapping in Nikica Jelavic's low cross barely ninety seconds after coming on to send Everton up to fifth.

RESULTS
Chelsea 0 QPR 1 (Wright-Phillips 78)
Liverpool 3 (Sterling 19, Suarez 26, 52) Sunderland 0
Newcastle 1 (Cisse 2) Everton 2



PHOTO: AFP
Bayern Munich's midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger (R) controls the ball during a training session at Aspire Academy for Sports Excellence on January 3, 2013 in Doha.