

Walcott pens new deal

AFP, London

Theo Walcott ended months of speculation on Friday by signing a contract extension with Arsenal.

The 23-year-old England forward's former deal was to expire at the end of the season and he could have left the London club on a free transfer.

However, it is understood he has now agreed a new three-and-a-half-year deal worth in the region of close to £100,000 per week.

Walcott, who joined the Gunners from Southampton as a teenager seven years ago, told Arsenal's website on Friday: "I have made it clear from the start that I wanted to stay at Arsenal, so I am pleased we have agreed a deal that everyone is happy with."

Sven snubs 1860 job

AFP, Munich

Ex-England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson has snubbed German second division side 1860 Munich, just three days after it was announced the Swede would join the Bavarian outfit's coaching staff.

Eriksson, 64, had met the club's board for seven hours on Tuesday before it was confirmed that he would work alongside coach Alexander Schmidt.

But 1860, who share the Allianz Arena with Bayern Munich but were relegated in 2004, said Friday that after a period of reflection, Eriksson had changed his mind.

The club's Jordanian investor Hasan Ismaik had wanted Eriksson appointed as head coach but a compromise was reached for the Swede to work with Schmidt, who took charge in November.

Eriksson had been working with Thai club Tero Sasana and his lengthy resume of former clubs includes Benfica, Roma, Fiorentina, Sampdoria, Lazio and Manchester City.

As well as having coached England, he has also managed the national teams of Mexico (2008-09) and Ivory Coast (2010).

Schmidt, 44, was previously the club's Under-21 coach and only took charge of the first team on November 17 after Reiner Maurer was sacked.



Schalke midfielder Ciprian Marica (R) scores against Hannover during their Bundesliga match in Gelsenkirchen on Friday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Bale no match for Giggs

AFP, London



Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson believes Tottenham Hotspur's Gareth Bale still has a long way to go before he can be compared to Ryan Giggs, ahead of Sunday's encounter between the sides.

Bale is Giggs' heir in the Wales national side and the fleet-footed left-winger has already scored nine league goals this season, including a fine individual effort in Spurs' 3-2 win at Old Trafford in September.

Giggs, however, had already accumulated three league titles, two FA Cups and a League Cup by the time he was Bale's age, and Ferguson believes the Giggs of the early Premier League years had no equal.

"It is all opinions I suppose," Ferguson said. "The boy is a good player. But Ryan Giggs at 23? I don't think there was anyone better."

Now 39, Giggs produced another age-defying display in the mid-week FA Cup win over West Ham United, which saw Wayne Rooney mark his return from injury with a goal before blazing a second-half penalty over the crossbar.

United have now missed five penalties this season, while Rooney's personal career tally of unsuccessful attempts from 12 yards stands at 10.

Robin van Persie is expected to return to United's starting line-up at Spurs and with Ferguson refusing to back Rooney to continue taking spot-kicks, the Dutchman could step into the breach.

"I have not made a decision about that," Ferguson said.

"We don't want to be missing penalties. It is a regular opportunity. But it is not something I want to discuss."

United's lead at the league summit will be whittled down to four points if second-place Manchester City defeat Fulham on Saturday, and in Tottenham they face opponents who have lost just once in 13 matches.

The two sides are the only teams in the division to have avoided defeat in their last six games, although United will take heart from the fact that they have not lost at White Hart Lane since a 3-1 reverse in May 2001.

Ferguson is expected to make several changes to the side that faced West Ham, but Jonny Evans and Ashley Young remain unavailable through injury and Darren Fletcher has been ruled out for the rest of the campaign.

Spurs, meanwhile, could hand a first league start of the season to central midfielder Scott Parker after Brazilian Sandro was ruled out for the rest of the campaign with a knee ligament injury.

And with Emmanuel Adebayor

now gearing up for the Africa Cup of Nations with Togo, Tottenham manager Andre Villas-Boas has only one true striker at his disposal in the form of Jermain Defoe.

Despite the blow of losing Sandro, Villas-Boas says the club are not looking to sign a replacement in the January transfer window.

"The only thing we have done at the moment is hold on to our midfielders, the ones who are here," Villas-Boas said.

"We have put on hold the movement of Jake Livermore's possible loan to another club. It is not out of the question, I think we are still pretty happy with what we have."

Tottenham go into the weekend just two points behind third-place Chelsea, who drew 2-2 at home to Southampton in mid-week.

However, despite having seen his side prevail at Old Trafford, Villas-Boas believes United will be a very different prospect on Sunday.

"A lot of time has gone by in between," he said.

"I think it was the fifth or sixth game of the season and United had already lost to Everton and lost to us at home."

"From then on they have been on a formidable run and they sit now with one more point than the league leaders last season, who were Man City."

"The run of form is amazing. It is going to be a completely different game."

Schalke win a thriller

REUTERS, Berlin



Schalke 04 scored four times in the second half to beat battling Hanover 96 5-4 for their first win since November and climb to fifth in a dazzling restart to the Bundesliga season on Friday following a four-week winter break.

It was not until Lewis Holtby, who is joining Tottenham Hotspur at the end of the season, restored a two-goal cushion two minutes from time that Schalke wrapped up the three points.

The Champions League side started strongly with Marco Hoeger and Julian Draxler missing good chances in the opening minutes.

Schalke, without suspended Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Jermaine Jones and a string of injuries, looked to be running out of ideas before Jefferson Farfan scored after a Christian Fuchs long throw was headed into the Peruvian's path in the 44th minute.

Teenager Draxler drilled in a second goal for the hosts five minutes after the restart.

Hanover launched a comeback when Sergio Pinto's 18-metre shot took a wicked deflection off Schalke's Roman Neustaedter in the 55th and Hungarian Szabolcs Huszti silenced the home crowd with a low left-foot drive four minutes later.

The revival did not last long, however, with Hoeger firing Schalke back in front after 64 minutes and Ciprian Marica curling a shot past keeper Ron-Robert Zieler in the 67th.

Hanover struck back instantly with Huszti volleying in his second goal before midfielder Holtby tapped home to settle Schalke's nerves in the 88th.

Hanover striker Mame Diouf's spectacular bicycle kick on the final whistle was the goal of the game but came too late.

Schalke, who now have 28 points, were desperate for a winning start, having picked up just two points from their last six games.

FA charges Allardyce

REUTERS, London

West Ham United manager Sam Allardyce has been charged with misconduct by the FA for comments to the media after Wednesday's FA Cup third-round replay defeat at Manchester United.

Allardyce did not hide his annoyance after his side were not awarded what he considered a penalty while United did get a spot kick, a decision he put down to United enjoying home advantage.

West Ham were denied a penalty in the all-Premier League tie when the ball struck Rafael's arm but the hosts got one when Jordan Spence handled late on although Wayne Rooney missed the spot kick.

"You see it time and time again at Old Trafford," Allardyce had said after Wednesday's 1-0 defeat. "There's no doubt about the difference between Rafael's handball and Jordan Spence's. Spence plays for West Ham and the away team, while Rafael plays for the home side at Old Trafford."

The FA said on its website on Friday that the charge was "in relation to an alleged breach of FA Rule E3".

It concerned: "media comments which questioned the integrity of the match referee and/or match officials in general and/or implied that the match referee and/or match officials in general are motivated by bias and/or brought the game into disrepute."

Allardyce has until Wednesday to respond to the charge.

Star SPORT

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Yes (84%)

No (13%)

No comment (3%)

Total votes: 229

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ESPN

English Premiership

Chelsea v Arsenal

Live from 7:30pm

Tottenham v Man United

Live from 10:00pm

Serie A

Roma v Inter Milan

Live from 1:40am (Monday)

STAR Sports

Australian Open

Men & Women's 4th Round

Live from 6:00am

Primera Liga

Atletico Madrid v Levante

Live from 12:00am (Monday)

Serie A

DAY'S EVENT

Barisal v Khulna

Time: 2:00pm

Rajshahi v Sylhet

Time: 6:00pm

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

Bangladesh Premier League

Muktijoddha v Abahani

Time: 2:45pm



UAE midfielder Omar Abdul Rahman (R) shoots to score the opening goal against Iraq during their Gulf Cup final in Manama on Friday.

UAE lift Gulf Cup

Football

AFP, Manama

United Arab Emirates defeated former Asian champions Iraq 2-1 in extra-time to claim their second Gulf Cup title in a thrilling final on Friday.

Substitute Ismail al-Hammadi scored the winner in the 107th minute as thousands of UAE fans, flown in by chartered flights especially for the title showdown, roared in celebration.

Al-Hammadi, who replaced Ali Mabkhout in the 62nd minute, latched on to a pass from Amer Abdulrahman and neatly slid the ball past the right of Iraqi goalkeeper Noor Sabri.

Omar Abdulrahman had conjured the lead for the UAE in the 28th minute while Iraq captain Younis Mahmoud Khalaf equalised nine minutes from time.

Abdulrahman's solo goal was the best of the championship as the 21-year-old slipped into the penalty box before slamming the ball to the left of Sabri.

Iraq had to wait till the 81st minute to get back into the match with Khalaf, in front of goal, coolly slotting the ball past goalkeeper Ali Khaseif for his second goal of the championship.

Khalaf could have sealed the match six minutes later when he did well to beat Abdulaziz Sanqor inside the penalty box.

but he shot directly at Khaseif.

Mabkhout had the first attempt on goal in the eighth minute from the left and a few minutes later Ahmad Khalil, who scored the last-minute winner against Kuwait in the semi-finals, tried from the right but on both occasions Sabri came to Iraq's rescue.

For Iraq, Ahmed Yasin and lone striker Khalaf made a couple of encouraging moves midway through the first-half but were thwarted by UAE defenders.

UAE could have doubled their lead early in the second half as Amer Abdulrahman's powerful long ranger from the left went slightly wide and Khalil's attempt from close was also off target.

Iraq came up with their own attack in the 58th minute when Adnan made a move from the left but his powerful left-foot drive was punched away by a diving Khaseif.

UAE, made up mostly of players who were part of the national team which took part in the 2012 London Olympics, kept pressing for the second goal but failed to find a way past goalkeeper Sabri.

For UAE coach Mahdi Ali, the only one of two native coaches among the eight nations in the fray, it was a moment of crowning glory having earlier steered his team to victory in the 2008 AFC Under-19 Championship, a silver medal at the 2012 Asian Games and a berth in the 2012 Olympics.