

Beckham set for PSG move

AFP, London

Former England captain David Beckham was set to join French club Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) on Thursday, both the BBC and Sky Sports News reported.

The 37-year-old midfielder, who has been without a club since ending a five-and-a-half-year spell in the United States last month after winning the MLS Cup with the Los Angeles Galaxy, was reportedly in line to be unveiled by PSG at a 5:00 pm local (1600 GMT) news conference.

PSG sporting director Leonardo made no comment about the reports when contacted by AFP. Beckham, who made 115 appearances for England -- a national record for an outfield player -- first came to prominence at Manchester United and helped the club win the Treble in 1999 when they took the English Premier League, FA Cup and European Champions League titles.

Gibbs out for three weeks

AFP, London

Arsenal defender Kieran Gibbs has been ruled out for three weeks after suffering a thigh strain in his side's 2-2 draw against Liverpool on Wednesday.

Gibbs was forced off in the 37th minute at the Emirates Stadium and Gunners manager Arsene Wenger doesn't expect to see the left-back in action again until late February. "He has a thigh strain that rules him out for the next three weeks. It's a blow for us of course," Wenger said.

"He was an important player for us going forward and the game we wanted to play. It's a shame he's out for the next three weeks." Gibbs will miss Saturday's meeting with Stoke and a further Premier League clash against Sunderland, while he could also be a doubt for the Champions League last 16 first leg against Bayern Munich.

Wenger said he would think about looking for a replacement for Gibbs before the transfer window closes on Thursday, but he also confirmed his move for Barcelona striker David Villa had been called off.

Rooney inspires MU

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney's double helped Manchester United restore their seven-point lead at the top of the Premier League as they came from behind to beat Southampton 2-1 at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

Southampton took a shock third minute lead when Michael Carrick's poor back-pass left David de Gea in trouble, with Jay Rodriguez despoising the goalkeeper before rolling the ball into the net.

However, United were only behind for five minutes with Rooney equalising after the England striker was played in by Shinji Kagawa.

And Rooney made it 2-1 in the 27th minute after a Robin van Persie free-kick was headed back across goal by Patrice Evra.

United had the ball in the Saints net for a third time but the 'goal' was disallowed for offside.

Elsewhere, Chelsea blew a 2-0 lead as Reading climbed out of the bottom three after 'supersub' Adam Le Fondre scored two late goals in a 2-2 draw.

The Blues, held to a draw by third-tier Brentford in the FA Cup, had to wait until first-half stoppage-time before taking the lead at the Madejski Stadium, with a neat pass from Fernando Torres setting up his fellow Spaniard Juan Mata, who drilled a low shot into the net.

Frank Lampard, repeatedly linked with a move away from Chelsea despite impressing yet again this term, made it 2-0 in the 66th minute when he rose above the Royals' defence to head in a corner.

But Le Fondre increased the pressure on Chelsea interim manager Rafael Benitez with two well-struck goals in the final three minutes.

Arsenal also came from 2-0 behind at

home to Liverpool to force a 2-2 draw that did little for the top four ambitions of either club.

Liverpool needed just five minutes to take the lead at the Emirates after a series of mistakes involving Bacary Sagna, Thomas Vermaelen and Aaron Ramsey created a chance for Daniel Sturridge, whose shot was saved.

But when the ball broke to fellow striker Luis Suarez, the Uruguayan swept his effort past Wojciech Szczesny.

More bad Arsenal defending allowed Jordan Henderson to burst into the penalty area before his initial shot was blocked only for the midfielder to score on the follow-up in the 60th minute.

But within a few minutes Arsenal scored twice.

Olivier Giroud headed in Jack Wilshere's free-kick and the Frenchman then turned provider for Theo Walcott, who equalised with a powerful shot.

Tottenham remained fourth thanks to Gareth Bale's superb leveller in a 1-1 draw away to Norwich.

The Canaries, fresh from the embarrassment of being knocked out of the FA Cup by non-league

Luton, went ahead when Wes Hoolahan turned in Anthony Pilkington's 32nd minute cross.

But Wales winger Bale struck in the 80th minute when he collected the ball inside his own half, ran at the defence and curled a shot across the goalkeeper.

Fifth-placed Everton closed to within a point of Tottenham after a 2-1 win at home to West Bromwich Albion.

Leighton Baines gave Everton a 29th minute lead at Goodison Park when his well-timed run saw him found by Leon Osman before the left-back lashed a shot into the roof of the net from 16 yards.

Baines then doubled Everton's lead with a penalty on the stroke of half-time.

RESULTS

Arsenal 2 (Giroud 64, Walcott 67)
Liverpool 2 (Suarez 5, Henderson 60)
Everton 2 (Baines 29, 45-pen)
West Bromwich Albion 1 (Long 65)
Fulham 3 (Berkatov 10, Rodallega 49, O'Brien 90-og)
West Ham 1 (Nolan 48)
Manchester United 2 (Rooney 8, 27) Southampton 1 (Rodriguez 3)
Norwich 1 (Hoolahan 32)
Tottenham 1 (Bale 80)
Reading 2 (Le Fondre 87, 90)

Balotelli in Milan

AFP, Milan

AC Milan have officially tied former Inter striker Mario Balotelli to a deal that will see him remain at the Serie A club until 2017.

A statement by Milan said: "Mario Balotelli is officially a Milan player until 2017."

"The club has bought Mario Balotelli from Manchester City F.C. and he has signed a contract which expires in June 2017."

Earlier, Milan welcomed Balotelli to the club following his arrival from City with a cheeky reference to the 'Why Always Me?' T-shirt the striker famously exposed in a 2011 derby against United.

"Yes, always you", was the headline on the Milan webpage officially welcoming Balotelli to the Rossoneri, a club he openly supported while playing for Milan rivals Inter.

Balotelli exposed the 'Why Always Me?' message after scoring two goals in an October 2011 derby against Manchester United.

The message was generally believed to

target the many media reports of the many stunts and incidents that made Balotelli a household name during his time in the Premier League.

Two days prior to the derby in question, for example, Balotelli set his house on fire after throwing fireworks out of the bathroom window.

Balotelli arrived in Milan on Wednesday and said he hoped he could revive his career after a roller-coaster spell with the English champions.

"I didn't start the season very well with City so I am coming to Milan to revive myself and to do well," said Balotelli as he prepared to return to Serie A in a deal said to be worth around \$30 million (22 million euros).

"I have wanted to play for Milan for a long time, but I was with other teams. When this chance came along I grabbed it. I hope Milan can become a big club again."

Balotelli, who will wear the number 45 shirt, was set to complete a medical on Thursday and be unveiled to the press on Friday evening.

Milan, who have climbed to fifth place at 12 points behind leaders Juventus following a disastrous start to the season, host Udinese on Sunday.

Varane rescues

REAL MADRID

AFP, Madrid

French youngster Raphael Varane headed in a late goal for Real Madrid to level the Spanish Cup semifinal first-leg against Barcelona as the Spanish giants drew 1-1 on Wednesday.

Cesc Fabregas had earlier given Barca a lead in a breathless match in the Santiago Bernabeu that his side looked to be running away with until the leveller. Varane was Madrid's star all evening, clearing off the line in the first-half and making countless other defensive interventions in an entertaining encounter.

With the second-leg almost a month away, Madrid, who trail Barca by 15 points in the league, will be relieved to avoid defeat and will now look to the Champions League last-16 first-leg against Manchester United in the same stadium in less than two weeks. Jose Mourinho decided to partner Varane and Ricardo Carvalho in the centre of a depleted defence, with Sergio Ramos and Fabio Coentrao out through suspension and Pepe injured.

At right back Michael Essien was favoured over Marcelo, just back from injury, and Diego Lopez was called up for his debut in goal after he signed

from Sevilla last Friday to replace the injured Iker Casillas.

With coach Tito Vilanova in New York receiving further cancer treatment, assistant Jordi Roura took over for a Barca side with far fewer problems, Jose Manuel Pinto was in his customary position in goal for the Spanish Cup, in for Victor Valdes.

And the reserve keeper was immediately called into action to block a Cristiano Ronaldo free-kick after Gerard Pique saw a yellow card on 40 seconds for tripping the Portuguese star on the edge of the area.

He had to be alert again on nine minutes to tip over an Essien cross and Madrid were looking the more direct and dangerous of the two teams in the opening minutes.

The pace was fast and furious and Ronaldo just failed to connect with a Benzema cross in front of goal and then Xavi curled a free-kick onto the crossbar at the other end.

The best chance of the first-half fell to Barca on 22 minutes when Fabregas anticipated a poor back pass from Carvalho and teed up Xavi whose shot was blocked on the line by Varane.

Then at the other end a Benzema snap shot hit the side netting before Messi hit a free-kick over the bar.

At the start of the second period Benzema exchanged

passes with Ronaldo before shooting high, but it wasn't long before Barca went ahead.

A Jose Callejon clearance fell to Messi whose quick thinking pass to Fabregas left the former Arsenal captain with an easy finish on 50 minutes.

From that point Madrid lost their impetus and Varane had to make a fantastic last-gasp intervention to stop Fabregas from adding another.

Ronaldo stooped to head an Essien cross inches wide but Barca were playing a more measured passing game after the goal and dominating possession.

Gerard Pique was quicker than Ronaldo to a cross when Madrid did break on the counter-attack on 67 minutes and it was Fabregas again at the other end who shot just over three minutes later.

Fabregas then released Pedro Rodriguez who should have doubled the lead on his 200th appearance for Barca, but he badly miscued his shot from close range.

Just when it looked like Barca would leave with victory, Varane popped up to head home a Mesut Ozil cross with nine minutes to go.

Lopez had to save well from Jordi Alba in the closing minutes but a draw was a fair result in the end with all to play for in the Nou Camp on February 27.



Real Madrid defender Raphael Varane (C) celebrates his equalising goal with teammates during their Copa del Rey semifinal first leg against Barcelona at Bernabeu on Wednesday.

Brazil set Swiss date

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil will face Switzerland in a friendly on August 14 in what will be their first match after June's Confederations Cup, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) announced Wednesday.

The CBF revealed that the match will be played at the St Jakob Park in the Swiss city of Basel.

Luiz Felipe Scolari's side, who will host the 2014 World Cup, have already arranged four friendly matches before hosting the Confederations Cup, which will run from June 15-30.

They will face England at Wembley on February 6, before taking on Italy in Geneva, Switzerland on March 21 and then travelling to London for a game against Russia four days later.

Scolari, who recently returned for a second spell as coach of the Selecao after leading the team to glory at the 2002 World Cup in South Korea and Japan.

Togo in last eight

AFP, Nelspruit

Togo drew 1-1 with Tunisia on Wednesday to complete the Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinal cast list and send the Carthage Eagles heading back to Tunis.

After Serge Gakpe's opener for Togo was cancelled out by Khalid Mouelhi's penalty, the two countries finished level on points, with Togo owing their first appearance in the knockout stages at the seventh attempt to superior goal difference.

Mouelhi then missed from the spot late in the second half, his failure condemning Tunisia to an early exit.

The draw bagged Togo the runners-up spot in Group D and a last eight match-up with Burkina Faso here on Sunday, with the Burkinabe coach Paul Put an interested observer in the stands.

Group D winners Ivory Coast meet Nigeria in Rustenburg the same day.

Togo coach Didier Six made two changes, Moustapha Salifou and Jonathan Ayite dropping to the bench and replaced by Vincent Bossou and Ayite's brother, Floyd.

Skilful midfielder Youssef Msakni started for Tunisia after overcoming a bout of tonsillitis.

Coach Sabr Trabelsi brought in Oussama Darragi, Walid Hichri and Wahbi Khazri for Fakhreddine Ben Youssef, Bilel

Ifa and Anis Boussaidi.

Tunisia were once again without injured key striker Issam Jemaa.

On 10 minutes Togo captain and Tottenham striker Emmanuel Adebayor almost put the little west African nation in front.

Three minutes later Togo did take the lead, with Adebayor neatly finding Gakpe, the Nantes striker slotting the ball past Moez Ben Cherifia although replays hinted at offside.

Tunisia, requiring two goals now to deny Togo, were struggling to make their presence felt at the Mbombela stadium.

Until the 28th minute that is when they drew back level via Mouelhi's side-footed penalty awarded when Dare Nibombe fouled Esperance midfielder Hichri.

Tunisia, buoyed by their equaliser, ended the first half the better side, and they had a justified but rejected appeal for a second penalty after the restart when Vincent Bossou felled Darragi.

Down at the other end, Adebayor skipped past a couple of Tunisian defenders, squaring the ball into the box but Komlan Amewou was unable to do the move justice.

On 69 minutes Adebayor's flying header hit the crossbar as Togo came at the Tunisians with all guns blazing again.

South African referee Daniel Bennett was arguably not having the best of games, making some dubious decisions.



Channel 9

BPL

Dhaka Gladiators v Durronto Rajshahi

Live from 2:00pm

Chittagong Kings v Khulna Royal

Bengals

Live from 6:00pm

STAR Sports

Australia v West Indies

First ODI

Live from 9:20am

STAR Cricket

ICC Women's World Cup

England v Sri Lanka

Live from 9:30am

TEN Cricket

South Africa v Pakistan

First Test, Day 1



AC Milan's latest signing Italian striker Mario Balotelli (L) shakes hands with executive director Adriano Galliani upon his arrival at the Malpensa Airport in Milan on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP



BPL

Dhaka Gladiators v Durronto Rajshahi

Time: 2:00pm

Chittagong Kings v Khulna

Royal Bengals

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