

BEST 2014 TWEETS



Paul D. Taylor (@Squizabilly)

#RIPPhillipHughes #putoutyourbats
Paul Taylor started a global sensation when he tweeted a simple picture of his bat against the wall to pay tribute to Australian Philip Hughes, which saw millions follow suit.

Ronaldo (@Cristiano)

David Beckham, Cristiano Ronaldo and Michael Jordan were among the various sports stars to participate in the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' to raise awareness for ALS. #IceBucketChallenge trended worldwide and had backing from many celebrities and regular people across the globe.

Rafa Diya (@m.diya15)

Chiellini from being Suarez's meal #ThingsTimHowardCouldSave trended after Tim Howard's record of 16 saves against Belgium in the 2014 FIFA World Cup as people posted things which he could have saved from happening.

Kevin Pietersen (@KP24)

WAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!! MY CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT EXPIRES AT MIDNIGHT TONIGHT.
Pietersen could not contain his delight at the expiration of his confidentiality agreement, which allowed for him to publish his controversial autobiography unhindered.

Mario Balotelli (@finally_mario)

If we beat Costa Rica i want a kiss, obviously on the cheek, from the UK Queen.
Balotelli's most recent tweet may have led to a one-game suspension, but there were many others which

Milan end Real run

AFP, Dubai

Serie A giants AC Milan 'ended' Real Madrid's 22 match winning streak on Tuesday as striker Stephan El Shaarawy scored twice in a 4-2 friendly win in Dubai.

The European champions had won 22 matches in all competitions coming into the clash although Tuesday's match was classified as a friendly and not an official fixture.

Real, won the World Club Cup on Sunday with a 2-0 win over Argentine club San Lorenzo, but El Shaarawy did the damage for the Italians with goals either side of half-time while Frenchman Jeremy Menez and Giampaolo Pazzini were also on target.

Villa fined for player disorder

AFP, London

Aston Villa have been fined £30,000 (\$46,700, 38,400 euros) for failing to control their players during their recent 1-1 draw with Manchester United, the Football Association (FA) announced on Tuesday.

The charge relates to the reaction of Villa's players after Gabriel Agbonlahor was sent off for a challenge on Ashley Young during the 1-1 draw at Villa Park earlier this month. The red card was later rescinded.

Meanwhile, Villa midfielder Fabian Delph has lost his appeal against the red card.



AC Milan captain Riccardo Montolivo lifts the Dubai Challenge Cup trophy after beating Real Madrid in their friendly match at the Sevens Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

PSG edge past Inter

AFP, Marrakech



French champions Paris Saint-Germain finished 2014 with a victory as a second half goal from Yohan Cabaye handed them a narrow 1-0 victory over Serie A side Inter Milan on Tuesday in Morocco.

In a prestige friendly, held in the North African country recently stripped of the right to host the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations, PSG coach Laurent Blanc made numerous changes at the Grand Stade in front of some 30,000 supporters.

Former Newcastle favourite Cabaye grabbed the only goal of the match on

57 minutes when he converted following sustained pressure from the capital club.

Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani was a notable absentee along with Argentinian Ezequiel Lavezzi, while talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic was given a chance to prove his return to fitness and lasted the full 90 minutes.

"It was a good match," said Swede Ibrahimovic. "We've had a super three days here with very intensive training sessions. Winning is good for the confidence but the most important thing is to work well to prepare the second part of the season."

Meanwhile, Blanc said he would be awaiting "some explications" from both Cavani and Lavezzi, who missed

the training camp in Morocco.

"They'll arrive on (January) 2 in the morning in Paris," explained Blanc, who refused to be drawn on a possible transfer of either of the two players when the window opens on Saturday.

"We can't say that today. We're going to wait until they arrive," he said. "We'll expect some explanations, and then we'll make sporting decisions as a club."

Inter Milan coach Roberto Mancini, meanwhile, said that the Italian club had not been in contact with Lavezzi.

"Lavezzi is a great player, but he's a PSG player. There is no contact and it's not for me to contact him," said Mancini.

PSG are currently third in Ligue 1 but only three points behind leaders and arch rivals Marseille.

'Bale not for sale at any price'

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid have made clear to Manchester United and other possible suitors for his signature that Gareth Bale is not for sale at any price.

Real president Florentino Perez told Spanish newspaper Marca that Welshman Bale, who signed for the European champions for a world record 100 million euros (\$121.6 million) last year, was key to the club's present and future.

"Just as I can't imagine Real Madrid without Cristiano (Ronaldo), I can't imagine Real Madrid without Bale either," Perez said.

Bale has been linked with a move to Premier League giants United, who have been undertaking very expensive rebuilding under manager Louis van Gaal.

"We have not received an offer from Manchester or any other club for Gareth Bale," Perez said.

"We haven't received any offers for one simple reason: every club knows that Gareth Bale will never leave Real Madrid and that the club will not discuss their star, no matter how much is offered."

It has not taken Bale long to woo the Bernabeu fans, with his goals in the King's Cup and Champions League finals establishing his credentials as a world-class performer on the big occasion. At 25, he is growing into his Galactico boots.

"Bale is a key player," Perez said. "He has already done so much for the team and is a key part of our club's future."

'Sturridge set for January return'

REUTERS, London

Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge is set for a January return, according to manager Brendan Rodgers, who hinted he was unlikely to dip into the transfer market to solve the club's current striker issues.

Sturridge last played for Liverpool in August after suffering a thigh injury on international duty with England and his absence has been keenly felt as the Merseysiders have struggled for goals and consistency in a disappointing start to the season.

With close-season signing Mario Balotelli failing to score a Premier League goal and Rickie Lambert, another summer arrival, struggling to cement a place in the side, Sturridge's return to action cannot come soon enough for last season's runners-up.

"He's coming back into the country in early January to finalise his rehab here," Rodgers told reporters on Wednesday.

"Hopefully at some point in January -- the middle to end -- he'll be available to play."

Rodgers has drafted Raheem Sterling into a make-shift centre forward role in recent weeks in an effort to replicate last season's scintillating attacking play, but he said he does not expect any new arrivals in January.

"My first look is always within," he said. "We have seen how we have adapted the team and the structure of the team in order to make that work. I still think we've got players that can do that for us."

"So there won't be much activity for us in January. We brought in a lot of players over the course of the summer that we feel can develop, and those players are now starting to adapt to the life here at Liverpool and our way of working."

Relegation dread heralds New Year

AFP, London



The chill winds of relegation anxiety have blown across the Premier League ahead of Thursday's New Year's Day programme, with a burst of managerial comings and goings ushering in 2015.

A week ago, all 20 managers who had started the season were still in place, but two clubs approach the new year without a manager, while Newcastle United are poised to lose Alan Pardew.

Crystal Palace were the first club to press the panic button, firing Neil Warnock the day after a Boxing Day defeat at home to Southampton that saw the south London club slip into the relegation zone.

Pardew is in line to return to Palace, where he spent four years as a player, after being given permission to speak to his former club by Newcastle.

Palace visit Aston Villa on Thursday and Keith Millen, who has been placed in charge on a caretaker basis, has called on the club to appoint a successor to Warnock swiftly.

"You'd think that it would cause a lot of unrest among the players, but they have coped unbelievably well," said Millen.

"But you wouldn't want it to continue for weeks on end, because that's when I think the lads want some guidance on where the club's going. So hopefully this can get solved pretty quickly."

Two days after Warnock's sacking, West Bromwich Albion announced the dismissal of Alan Irvine following a return of one win from nine games that has left the Midlands club just a point above the bottom three.

West Brom, who have reportedly opened talks with Tony Pulis and Tim Sherwood, travel to West Ham United on Thursday.

While Palace and West Brom are desperate for points, Newcastle are in a position of relative prosperity, having climbed to 10th place in the table after Sunday's 3-2 win over Everton.

But although many Newcastle fans will not mourn Pardew's exit, they will be wary of a downturn in fortunes ahead of a home game against Burnley, who fought back to draw 2-2 at champions Manchester City last weekend.

With Pardew apparently heading for the exit, assistant coaches John Carver and Steve Stone will take charge for the match against Burnley.

Bottom club Leicester City kickstarted

their fight to beat the drop by winning 1-0 at Hull City on Sunday, which left them three points from safety.

Leicester visit improving Liverpool on Thursday, while Hull, who are above third-bottom Palace on goal difference alone, host out-of-form Everton.

City's slip-up against Burnley meant that Chelsea preserved their three-point lead at the summit despite being held to a 1-1 draw at Southampton on Sunday.

But Jose Mourinho's side face a taxing trip to a Tottenham Hotspur team who have moved to within two points of the Champions League places after a five-game unbeaten run.

"I think it's going to be tough. We knew it was not over," said Chelsea striker Didier Drogba of the title race.

"A few years ago, I think we were 11 or 12 points in front of Man United and then they won the league. So eight points or nine points -- I don't know how many points we had on top of Man City -- I think it is not enough."

"At that time of the season, it was too early, but I think now we start again a new championship. I think the game is on."

City will also be seeking to return to winning ways when they host Sunderland, while third-place Manchester United, who drew 0-0 at Spurs on Sunday, raise the curtain on 2015 with a match at Stoke City.

Perhaps the most intriguing contest of the weekend takes place at St Mary's, where fourth-place Southampton host fifth-place Arsenal with a berth in the top four at stake.

Arsenal gained ground on the teams above them with a 2-1 win at West Ham at the weekend, but Southampton, who they trail on goal difference, have now gone three games unbeaten following a run of poor results.

"You give your best and if there is a weakness in front of you, you want to take advantage of it," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

FIXTURES

Thursday
(1500 GMT unless otherwise stated):
Aston Villa v Crystal Palace, Hull City v Everton, Liverpool v Leicester City, Manchester City v Sunderland, Newcastle United v Burnley, Queens Park Rangers v Swansea City, Southampton v Arsenal, Stoke City v Manchester United (1245 GMT), Tottenham Hotspur v Chelsea (1730 GMT), West



As a nation we have come a long way, but there is still a long way to go.
This New Year let us face the challenges of building the nation together.

Happy New Year 2015



Ratanpur Steel Re-Rolling Mills