

WOODWARD HAILS YOUTUBE SUCCESS

Manchester United executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward yesterday hailed the success of the club's recently launched YouTube channel as the Premier League giants announced their latest quarterly results. Woodward highlighted the success of the club's YouTube channel, only launched in February, during a conference call -- it now has nearly 835,000 subscribers. "This quarter we launched the club's first YouTube channel and in terms of subscribers, within the first hour we overtook the Dallas Cowboys and an hour later we overtook the (New York) Yankees," he said. "The channel quickly became bigger than all the US sports teams and at currently over 800,000 subscribers we're the fastest-growing sports club channel that has ever launched on YouTube." But United are playing catch-up with their rivals. They are a long way behind pacesetters Barcelona, who have 4.2 million subscribers, and even neighbours Manchester City, who have 1.2 million.

—AFP



Juventus captain and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (R) poses for pictures with fans in front of the Allianz Stadium after a press conference in Turin yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Serbian ref in custody on fixing charge

AFP, Belgrade

A Serbian referee arrested on suspicion of match-fixing was remanded in custody for 30 days by a court in Novi Sad on Wednesday.

Srdjan Obradovic was detained on Tuesday charged with favouring the home team in the Balkan country's Super League fixture between Spartak and FC Radnicki on Saturday.

Obradovic awarded Spartak a penalty for no obvious reason even though the home side were already leading.

Spartak eventually won 3-0 and look set to qualify for Europe next season following their victory.

The tribunal remanded Obradovic into custody "to prevent the referee from influencing witnesses," a court's spokeswoman told AFP.

Buffon calls time on Juventus

AFP, Turin



Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon announced on Thursday that he will leave the Turin giants after 17 years but did not as expected declare the end of his playing career.

Buffon, 40, captained Juventus to a seventh straight Serie A title and fourth consecutive Italian Cup triumph this season.

"To end this adventure with two new victories was important," the Italian told a press conference at the Allianz Stadium.

"Saturday will be my final match with Juventus."

The former Parma goalkeeper will make his 640th Serie A appearance against Verona in Turin.

Buffon said he would like to take more time to reflect on his future which could be either on or off the pitch.

"What am I going to do? Saturday, I'm playing a match and it's the only thing that's certain," he continued.

"Until 15 days ago, I was sure to stop playing, but I received some exciting proposals, both on and off the pitch. Off the pitch the most interesting was made to me

by (Juventus) president (Andrea) Agnelli."

"Next week, after a few days of calm reflection, I will make a definite and certain decision."

According to the Italian press Buffon has received offers from top European clubs including Liverpool, Real Madrid and Paris Saint Germain.

It was a rollercoaster season for Buffon with Italy failing to qualify for the World Cup finals for the first time in six decades.

His final Champions League game ended in another fiasco last month as he raged into the night at the referee after being sent off late in a semi-final defeat by Real Madrid.

He is facing a UEFA ban for his verbal abuse of English referee Michael Oliver who he said had "a rubbish bag for a heart" and should "sit in the stands with your wife, your kids, having your drink and eating your crisps".

Italy's most capped player with 176, Buffon could make his international farewell on June 4 in a friendly against the Netherlands.

Buffon holds the record for going 974 minutes in Serie A football without conceding a goal and has kept 300 clean sheets in 655 competitive club matches.



Atletico Madrid's Argentinian coach Diego Simeone celebrates after his team won the Europa League final against Olympique Marseille at the Groupama Stadium in Lyon on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

A deserved reward for Simeone

AFP, Lyon



For a club like Atletico Madrid, success never comes easily, but Wednesday's Europa League final victory over Marseille served to underline just how far they have travelled in the years since Diego Simeone became coach.

The fiery Argentine said the 3-0 win over the French side in Lyon, achieved thanks to Antoine Griezmann's brace and a late Gabi goal, meant "much more than just winning a trophy".

Simeone took over a club that had been in a near constant state of disarray for more than a decade and almost immediately revived their fortunes.

But after one Europa League, one Copa del Rey and a La Liga title in his first two and a half years at the helm, the last few seasons had been defined more by the near misses.

Two Champions League final defeats in

agonising fashion against city rivals Real Madrid in 2014 and 2016 had many thinking Simeone might be tempted to accept an offer from one of Europe's super clubs.

Yet the 48-year-old has toughed it out through a FIFA-imposed transfer ban, a disappointing Champions League group-stage exit earlier this season and a January window when the club sold a clutch of valuable squad members.

He has led Atletico into their new stadium and to the club's third Europa League triumph in nine years, while also keeping them on course to finish above Real in La Liga.

"It has been a difficult season, but winning the Europa League is much more than just winning a trophy, it validates all our hard work, our determination," Simeone said after Wednesday's game.

"Last season we reached the semi-finals of the Champions League, and this season we started that competition badly, but we showed our manliness against Arsenal and that set us on the way to winning the cup."

Salah's boots sit at British Museum

AFP, London

Mohamed Salah fever has swept Britain since his arrival with Liverpool's goal machine earning two players awards and now a pair of his boots are to sit alongside Egyptian artefacts at the British Museum.

The 25-year-old Egyptian -- who set a new Premier League scoring record last season with 32 -- will have his boots on display in arguably the finest ancient Egyptian collection outside of the country itself.

The donation -- by Adidas -- is to celebrate Salah's winning the Premier League Golden Boot.

"This acquisition brings the British Museum's world-famous Egyptian collection right up to date," purred Neal Spencer, the British Museum's Keeper of Ancient Egypt and Sudan.

"The boots tell a story of a modern Egyptian icon, performing in the UK, with a truly global impact.

"Displayed amidst the statues of ancient pharaohs, we now show the boots with which Mo Salah won the Golden Boot for Liverpool."

Salah is not finished yet, though, as he heads to the Champions League final on Saturday week in Kiev against holders Real Madrid and thence to Russia leading Egypt's line in their first World Cup appearance in 28 years.

"This acquisition builds on our recent project to acquire objects to tell the story of day-to-day life in 20th and 21st century Egypt," said Spencer.



FIFA WORLD CUP 2018

AFP, Undated

NEYMAR FEELS 'GOOD' BACK IN TRAINING

Brazil's star forward Neymar said Wednesday he feels "comfortable" back in training ahead of the World Cup, after more than two months out with a broken foot bone.

Brazilian fans are crossing their fingers that the world's most expensive player will be 100 percent fit for their team's bid to win a record-extending sixth world title in Russia.

And the Paris Saint-Germain goal-scoring machine said his first sessions with the ball are going well.

"I started training with the ball, making passes, hitting it," he said in an interview on Facebook with Desimpedidos, the football chat and comedy channel started by former Brazilian great Kaka.

"I felt good, comfortable," he said. "Clearly there's some fear but I'm losing it bit by bit."

Responding to online questions from fans, Neymar said he'd even trade his frequently changing hair-

styles for an all-over shave if Brazil could win in Russia.

"If we win, I'll do whatever you want," he said.

WAGNER QUILTS GERMAN DUTY AFTER WC SNUB

Bayern Munich's out-spoken striker Sandro Wagner has reacted to his surprise omission from Germany's provisional World Cup squad by retiring from international duty.

"I hereby resign immediately from the national team," Wagner told German daily Bild.

"For me, it is clear that I do not seem to fit with the coaching team in the way I am always open, honest and address things directly."

The 30-year-old took a thinly-veiled swipe at head coach Joachim Loew for leaving him out of the 27-man squad, announced on Tuesday, for next month's World Cup as strikers Timo Werner, Mario Gomez and Nils Petersen were selected instead.

Wagner, who made his debut in 2017, helped an inexperienced squad win the Confederations Cup in Russia

last July and has scored five goals in just eight internationals.

"I would lie if I said that I am not disappointed, the World Cup would have been a great thing," said Wagner.

"Of course, I can't take it too seriously, because, as I have said many times before, there are far more important things in life besides football."

USA WOULD BE IN WORLD CUP UNDER KLINSMANN

Former United States coach Jurgen Klinsmann believes he would have successfully taken the team to the World Cup had he not been sacked during the qualification campaign.

In an interview with Sports Illustrated, the former Germany striker and coach was adamant that he could have turned around qualifying before he was axed in 2016.

Klinsmann was fired after opening defeats by Mexico and Costa Rica in CONCACAF's six-team final round of qualifying.

He was subsequently replaced by Bruce Arena, but the team suffered a disastrous defeat to Trinidad & Tobago in their final group game to miss out on Russia.

Klinsmann told Sports Illustrated he is certain the team would have recovered from the opening defeats to book a place in the finals.

"The team was on track. We would have swallowed the early defeats and moved on and get the job done," Klinsmann said.

The 53-year-old said his side was still in a developmental cycle building towards 2018 when they suffered the defeats that prompted his dismissal.

"You build a new skeleton between World Cups and we hadn't built the skeleton yet," Klinsmann said.

"When we lost two games, we were still building the skeleton. Sorry we lost two games! Then [the United States Soccer Federation] became emotional. ... But they made their decision, so no problem."



Paris Saint-Germain and Brazil superstar Neymar attends a training session at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

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