

PREMIERSHIP NEWS, GOSSIP & RUMOURS

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Arsenal dominated last week's transfer market activity in the Premiership, following up their capture of Everton striker Francis Jeffers for £10 million by signing Giovanni van Bronckhorst from Glasgow Rangers for £8.5 million and lining up Ipswich Town goalkeeper Richard Wright for £6 million.

The 26-year-old midfielder van Bronckhorst, a current Dutch international, was persuaded to join Arsenal after conversations with manager Arsene Wenger and a look around the Gunners' state-of-the-art training complex. Arsenal's other Dutchman, Dennis Bergkamp, also helped convince van Bronckhorst to come to Highbury.

Wenger told him he wants him to play alongside Patrick Vieira on the left side of centre midfield – a prospect that excites van Bronckhorst, who wants to win the League in England after winning the Scottish League twice with Rangers. Rumours persist that Vieira is considering leaving Arsenal, although the club emphatically deny this, insisting that Vieira will not be allowed to leave at any price.

Ipswich reluctantly gave Wright permission to talk to Arsenal after the Gunners put in a substantial bid for the 23-year-old, who has played for England. Although he recently signed a new three-year deal at Ipswich, Wright had a clause in his contract allowing him to move to Arsenal if they offered Ipswich an acceptable fee. Wright has already passed a medical but will not complete the move until his return from holiday in July.

His arrival will end Arsenal's interest in Feyenoord's Polish goalkeeper Jerzy Dudek, and puts pressure on 37-year-old England international David Seaman, the club's current first-choice goalkeeper. It also spells the probable end of Alex Manninger's Highbury career. The Austrian may be heading in the opposite direction, possibly joining Ipswich as part of the deal.

Their latest acquisitions will take Arsenal's summer spending above £24 million – but the club has not yet finished strengthening its squad to challenge for the Premiership title next season. Vice-chairman David Dein has given Sol Campbell a July 5th deadline to decide whether to join Arsenal

or Barcelona. The out-of-contract Spurs defender had indicated a preference to stay in London, but the Catalan giants have raised the stakes by reportedly offering him a £200,000-a-week deal. If Campbell rejects the Gunners, the club will step up its search for a central defender elsewhere.

Meanwhile, German midfielder Stefan Malz is set to join Kaiserslautern for £800,000, while Wenger is prepared to listen to offers of £10 million for Nigerian striker Kanu. Spain's Deportivo La Coruna are interested in Kanu, who has also attracted the attentions of his former club Inter Milan.

Ex-Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit looks increasingly likely to leave Barcelona for Chelsea, with whom he has apparently been having discussions, while Chelsea captain Denis Wise has joined Leicester City for £1.6 million.

Southampton's Moroccan midfielder Hassan Kachloul, who had earlier reached a verbal agreement to join Ipswich Town, changed his mind and has signed for Aston Villa instead, leaving Ipswich furious but impotent. There is now a strong possibility that Kachloul's best friend, fellow-Moroccan Mustapha Hadji, will join up with him at Villa Park in a move from relegated Coventry City. Villa's unsettled forward Julian Joachim may go to Coventry as part of the deal.

Liverpool have completed the signing of 20-year-old Norwegian midfielder John Arne Riise from Monaco for £4 million. Riise, who nearly joined Leeds United last season, was set to sign for newly-promoted Fulham until Liverpool declared their interest.

Similarly, West Ham United may lose out on signing Manchester United midfield pair Jonathan Greening and Mark Wilson. The 22-year-olds have been told they can leave Old Trafford and have had talks at Upton Park with the Hammers. However, Middlesbrough have now emerged as favourites to secure their services. New Boro boss Steve McClaren was recently first-team coach at United and that could help clinch the deal.

West Ham have also lost the services of veteran defender Stuart Pearce. The 39-year-old has agreed to drop down a division to join Kevin Keegan at Manchester City as player-coach. Keegan sees Pearce's experience, leadership qualities and commitment on the pitch as invaluable assets as he plots City's return to the top flight.

Ex-Hammers boss Harry Redknapp, widely tipped at one stage to succeed Glenn Hoddle as manager of Southampton, has instead committed himself to south-coast rivals Portsmouth. Redknapp joins the First Division club as

director of football; Graham Rix remains in charge of the first-team, while Southampton continue their search for a manager.

Sunderland are close to signing 29-year-old French striker Lilian Laslandes from Bordeaux for 2.8 million, while Everton have confirmed that Celtic centre-back Alan Stubbs, out of contract at the end of this month, is on their wanted list. The Liverpool-born, Everton-supporting Stubbs has overcome testicular cancer and returned to Celtic's all-conquering squad for the final few matches of last season.

Everton were disappointed when their £3.25 million bid for Anderlecht striker Tomasz Radzinski was rejected by the Belgian club. But they received a boost when their plans for a new £125 million 55,000-seater stadium at King's Dock, on the banks of the River Mersey, received support from Liverpool Vision, an organisation charged with regeneration of the city. There are still a number of other approvals to be obtained before the scheme gets the go-ahead, but the move that Everton's board regard as vital to the club's long-term survival is now one step closer.

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