

PREMIERSHIP NEWS, GOSSIP & RUMOURS

**By Graham Lister, Chief Football Correspondent,
China Monitor (UK) Sports Division**

German international wing-back Christian Ziege has signed for Tottenham Hotspur from Liverpool for an undisclosed fee. Ziege had failed to command a regular first-team place at Anfield after joining the Reds from Middlesbrough, and fell out with manager Gerard Houllier when he complained that being out of the first-team was jeopardising his international prospects with Germany.

Ziege becomes the fourth major addition to the Spurs squad this summer. Glenn Hoddle had previously recruited striker Teddy Sheringham, midfielder Gustavo Poyet and central defender Goran Bunjecovic, who is seen as a replacement for the departed Sol Campbell. However, Ukrainian striker Sergei Rebrov was recently rumoured to be unsettled at Tottenham and unhappy living in England. He has been linked with a possible move to AC Milan, although Hoddle insists there is no truth in this rumour and that Rebrov is happy to stay at Spurs.

Meanwhile Tottenham have been warned that the face defeat in ex-manager George Graham's £1 million compensation claim against them following his dismissal in March. Spurs have been ordered by the FA Premier League to attend an arbitration tribunal after refusing to compensate Graham. They claim he broke his contract by talking to the media about the limited amount of transfer funds available to buy new players. But Graham is being advised by the League Managers Association, who are confident their man has a very strong case for compensation.

Two close friends of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson wealthy Irish businessmen and horse racing enthusiasts J P McManus and John Mangier have paid £30 million to secure a stake of almost seven per cent in the Manchester United public limited company. They are now the second-largest shareholders in the club, a situation that appears to strengthen Ferguson's position significantly.

Two months ago, Ferguson announced that he would sever all ties with United when he retires as team manager at the end of next season, because the directors were unwilling to offer him the future role and salary that he wanted. Reaction from the fans was hostile, forcing the board to re-think its position. Chief executive Peter Kenyon then agreed a consultancy

role for Ferguson beginning in May 2002, offering him a five-year contract worth £1 million per year.

The latest development installs Ferguson's allies in a powerful position at the club, suggesting that Sir Alex could become a wide-ranging general manager with executive responsibilities for football matters – including the appointment of his successor as team boss.

United were accused by Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger of approaching Patrick Vieira without their permission. Vieira is under contract to Arsenal but has been quoted as saying he wants to leave the club. United are one of the clubs keen to buy the player if Arsenal agree to release him, but the Gunners insist that he is not for sale – and that anyway they would never sell him to their main rivals in the Premiership.

United admit being interested in Vieira but claim they asked Arsenal's board about the player rather than approach Vieira directly. Whatever the truth of the matter, the incident has further strained relations between the two clubs. Vieira's future remains uncertain. He has reported back at Highbury for pre-season training, but made no comment to the press. However, his agent reportedly flew to Madrid last week to discuss a deal with Real Madrid.

Real would probably have to offer cash plus players to meet Arsenal's £30 million valuation of Vieira should the Gunners reluctantly agree to sell. The London club appear to be making contingency plans to cover the loss of their best player. Wenger is on the verge of completing the signing of Japanese midfield star Junichi Inamoto from Gamba Osaka, and are also being linked with Barcelona's playmaker Josep Guardiola, who will soon be out of contract and has expressed a desire to play in the Premiership.

West Ham United had shown interest in Guardiola, but have now said they will not be making a bid for the Spanish international. New West Ham manager Glenn Roeder reacted angrily to press reports suggesting that Newcastle United were about to unveil Hammers forward Trevor Sinclair as their latest signing. Roeder said Newcastle had enquired about Sinclair but been rebuffed.

Another club rebuffed was First Division Wolverhampton Wanderers, who approached Aston Villa about the possibility of signing Paul Merson. Villa captain Merson subsequently reiterated his commitment to Villa, saying the club had shown its ambition with four new signings. Following the acquisition of Moroccans Mustapha Hadji and Hassan Kachloul, and goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel, Villa boss John Gregory has signed Swedish international centre-back Olof Mellberg from Racing Santander for £5

million. Mellberg is seen as the ideal replacement for Gareth Southgate, who has joined Middlesbrough. Boro boss Steve McClaren is also expected to complete the signing of Manchester United youngsters Jonathan Greening and Mark Wilson soon for a combined fee of £4 million.

Meanwhile ex-Boro striker Fabrizio Ravanelli is due to sign for Derby County on a two-year contract this week. Italian Ravanelli has agreed terms with Derby boss Jim Smith regarding his move from Lazio, and the deal is expected to be finalised after discussions in Italy between the player and his advisers.

Paul Gascoigne was in Italy with his Everton team-mates last week for pre-season training looking his fittest for years and declaring that his wild ways and troubled times were firmly behind him after a month of counselling at a special clinic in the United States. Gascoigne is determined to revive his career this season and believes Everton will be a much tougher proposition than they have been in recent years. The club was boosted last week by the arrival at the Italian training camp of Canadian international Tomasz Radzinski, the new striker signed from Anderlecht.

Leeds United winger Jason Wilcox has pledged his future to the Yorkshire club, saying he will fight to gain a regular first-team place. Wilcox, who has made relatively few Premiership starts for Leeds since joining from Blackburn Rovers in December 1999, was a target for new Manchester City boss Kevin Keegan, but is not looking for a move. His club, however, want to move from Elland Road and are seeking the opinions of their fans about a proposed move to a bigger stadium on the outskirts of the city.

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