

PREMIERSHIP NEWS, GOSSIP & RUMOURS

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Italian star Fabrizio Ravanelli flew into Britain last Friday to sign a two-year deal with Derby County. Known as the White Feather because of his distinctive hair colour, Ravanelli agreed a settlement payment with previous club Lazio which had threatened to prevent the move to Derby going ahead.

But the striker says he can't wait to start playing for the Rams in the Premiership. After making his name with Juventus, Ravanelli had a successful spell with Middlesbrough before moving on to Olympique Marseille. His arrival at Pride Park represents a major coup for manager Jim Smith and is a boost for Derby fans unhappy at the recent sale of promising midfielder Rory Delap to Southampton. Smith has also succeeded in persuading midfield dynamo Seth Johnson to commit himself to the club for a further three years, and hopes to strengthen his squad further by signing AC Milan defender Daniele Daino despite competition from Benfica and Alaves.

Chelsea have sold French World Cup winner Frank Leboeuf to Marseille, his home-town club. The central defender, who joined Chelsea from Strasbourg in 1996, enjoyed five successful years at Stamford Bridge but his future at the club became less secure following the emergence of John Terry and manager Claudio Ranieri's wish to lower the average age of his squad. Leboeuf, 33, had expressed a desire to return to France. More surprising is Chelsea's willingness to listen to offers for the impressive 20-year-old Italian midfielder Sam Dalla Bona. AC Milan have expressed interest in Dalla Bona, who is also the subject of a £5 million offer from Venezia. The player now looks certain to develop his career back in Italy.

Manchester United have added goalkeeping cover to their squad by signing Roy Carroll from Wigan Athletic for an undisclosed fee believed to be around £2.5 million. The Northern Ireland international said it was a dream come true to be joining United, whom he chose ahead of other interested Premiership clubs because of the chance to shadow French number one Fabien Barthez.

With David Beckham's contract talks progressing well and Ruud van Nistleroy among the goals during United's Asian tour, manager Sir Alex Ferguson has plenty of reasons to anticipate his last season in charge with

relish. Van Nistelrooy who said he was staggered by the sheer scale of United's popularity in Asia has strengthened competition for places among the strikers at Old Trafford. His arrival, plus that of Juan Sebastian Veron, has lifted the whole squad according to Ferguson, who has been pleased by the commitment of all his players as they stake their claims to be among the starting eleven when the new Premiership season kicks off on 18th August.

Meanwhile chief executive Peter Kenyon says the search for Ferguson's successor is underway. A short-list of managers with a proven record of achievement has already been drawn up, but one of the names believed to be on it can now be crossed off. Arsene Wenger has confirmed that he will be signing a new contract with Arsenal before the start of the new season.

Wenger unveiled Japanese central midfielder Junichi Inamoto to the British press last week following his arrival at Highbury from J-League side Gamba Osaka. Inamoto becomes the fifth summer signing for the Gunners, who have also secured the services of Sol Campbell, Francis Jeffers, Richard Wright and Giovanni van Bronckhorst.

The influx is expected to be followed by some departures, with Silvinho, Kanu, Matthew Upson and Alex Manninger all thought likely to leave Arsenal. A number of Spanish and Italian clubs have opened negotiations to sign the £12 million-rated Brazilian full-back Silvinho, who consequently has not gone on the club's pre-season tour to Austria.

Defender Martin Keown faces two FA charges of violent conduct arising from incidents during Arsenal's bad-tempered clash with Leeds United in May. If found guilty, Keown faces a three-match ban that would enhance the prospects of Sol Campbell and Tony Adams forming as new central defensive partnership.

Rivals Tottenham Hotspur have sold centre-back Luke Young (22) to Charlton Athletic for £3 million, but have abandoned plans to sign Argentine centre-half Jose Antonio Chamot from AC Milan.

Coventry's Swedish goalkeeper Magnus Hedman is reportedly on the verge of signing for a Premiership club thought to be Everton. The Toffees have turned down a bid from Middlesbrough for Michael Ball. The England defender has rejected a new contract from Everton, who are resigned to losing Ball but were not tempted by Boro's offer of around £5 million for his services. The offer involved cash plus captain Paul Ince.

Boro striker Andy Campbell has joined First Division Crystal Palace in a deal worth £1 million.

On the pitch, Aston Villa and Newcastle United both hope to make further progress in the InterToto Cup and so secure access into the UEFA Cup. Newcastle beat German side 1860 Munich 3-2 in Munich in the first leg of their semi-final with two goals by Nolberto Solano and a late winner from Aaron Hughes. For Villa, Darius Vassell scored a last-minute goal to give his side hope of overturning a 2-1 deficit in the second leg of the semi-final on Wednesday.

Both clubs are looking to add strikers to their squads ahead of the new season. Celta Vigo's South African Benni McCarthy is again interesting Villa, who have twice tried to sign him in the past. And Newcastle hope that an increased bid of £10 million for Paris St Germain striker Laurent Robert will be successful.

Ipswich have been linked with Nigerian forward Finidi George, and are also close to selling striker Jamie Scowcroft to Leicester City for £2.5 million.

Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier is unhappy about the demands likely to be made on his England internationals at the start of the season because of a heavy fixture schedule for club and country. He reportedly wants to discuss the matter with England manager Sven Goran Eriksson, and may ask that no Liverpool players are selected when England face Holland in a friendly in August. That game will be the last run-out for the national team before September's crucial World Cup qualification showdown with group leaders Germany. Steven Gerrard now hopes to be fit for that match following an injury that had threatened to rule him out for the first six weeks of the season.

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