

# RECORDS TUMBLE IN EUROPE'S TRANSFER 'MADNESS'

**PARIS:** Ousmane Dembele's transfer to Barcelona in a deal worth up to 147 million euros (\$175 million), making him the world's second most expensive player after Neymar, is the latest dizzying move fuelled by TV money and Gulf-based club owners.

The deal agreed Friday to bring 20-year-old French striker Dembele to the Spanish giants from Borussia Dortmund was a direct consequence of Neymar's shock 222-million-euro move to Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain that obliterated the world transfer record.

To further fill the gap left by Neymar's departure, Barcelona are expected to make a final push to sign

Liverpool's Brazilian playmaker Philippe Coutinho before the transfer window slams shut within days.

PSG, determined to mount a serious challenge for the Champions League, are also reportedly about to secure the signature of Monaco's teenage starlet Kylian Mbappe for another stratospheric fee. In England, Manchester City's Emirati owners have snapped up two of Mbappe's French title-winning Monaco teammates.

City paid £52 million (58 million euros, \$67 million), a world record fee for a defender, for full-back Benjamin Mendy and another £43 million for midfielder Bernardo Silva. They also added

England international defender Kyle Walker for £50 million as part of their summer spending spree.

### ROCKING THE BOAT

PSG and City and their Gulf-based owners "have shaken up the established order", said Virgile Caillaet, a marketing expert who heads the French federation of sport and leisure industries.

"For years a handful of clubs have shared out the best players, without criticising the system, and now they are facing a handful of new rivals and a bidding war that they weren't prepared for."

In the case of PSG, Qatar also appears to be seeking to exert its "soft power" at

more the domain of a select group of rich, mostly European-based clubs".

The sum paid for Neymar is however "an exception", Caillaet argued. "He is one of the three best players in the world and he is only 25, while the others (Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo) are in their thirties."

And in splashing out on Dembele and his 18-year-old France international teammate Mbappe, clubs are investing in the future.

"These are investments in future superstars who have a high potential resale value. It mustn't be forgotten that clubs are commercial entities with investment strategies," Caillaet said.—AFP

## SWANSEA KEEP DE BOER IN PALACE PURGATORY



**LONDON:** Frank de Boer's miserable start to life as Crystal Palace manager continued yesterday as his side lost 2-0 at home to Swansea City in the Premier League. Tammy Abraham's first Swansea goal since he joined on loan from Chelsea and a Jordan Ayew effort gave Paul Clement's Swansea their first victory of the campaign.

After defeats against Huddersfield Town and Liverpool, De Boer is still waiting for his first point and his first league goal as Palace manager. The former Netherlands defender was appointed in June after Sam Allardyce retired.

Swansea gave a debut to new signing Sam Clucas and flew out of the traps at Selhurst Park, going close in the fourth minute when Ayew headed just wide from Abraham's right-wing cross. James McArthur menaced for Palace, but Swansea remained on top and after Abraham had tested Wayne Hennessey and Alfie Mawson had headed off-target from the ensuing corner, they went ahead in the 44th minute. An injury to James Tomkins brought Martin Kelly into the Palace defence and he had been on the pitch for less than two minutes when Abraham stole in front of him to volley in Leroy Fer's cross.

It was Swansea's first shot on target of the season. Palace were booed off at half-time and despite De Boer sending on Lee Chung-Yong for Patrick van Aanholt at the break, the home side fell even further behind within three minutes of the restart. Kelly was once again at fault as he was robbed on halfway by Kyle Naughton, who freed Ayew to round Hennessey and score.

A perfectly timed sliding challenge by Mike van der Hoorn prevented Palace substitute Yohan Cabaye halving the arrears, while Andros Townsend dragged narrowly wide of the Swansea goal late on.—AFP



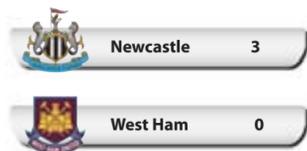
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
West Bromwich v Stoke City	15:30
Chelsea FC v Everton FC	15:30
Liverpool v Arsenal	18:00
Tottenham Hotspur v Burnley	8:00
SPANISH LEAGUE	
RCD Espanyol v CD Leganes	19:15
SD Eibar v Athletic de Bilbao	19:15
Getafe CF v Sevilla FC	21:15
Real Madrid v Valencia C.F.	23:15
ITALIAN CALCIO LEAGUE	
Torino FC v Sassuolo Calcio	19:00
ACF Fiorentina v UC Sampdoria	21:45
AC Milan v Cagliari Calcio	21:45
SSC Napoli v Atalanta	21:45
AC Chievo Verona v SS Lazio	21:45
Crotone v Hellas Verona FC2	1:45
Spal v Udinese Calcio	21:45
GERMAN BUNDESLIGA	
RB Leipzig v SC Freiburg	6:30
Hannover 96 v Schalke 04	19:00
EA Guingamp v RC Strasbourg	16:00
SCO Angers v LOSC Lille	18:00
AS Monaco v Olympique Marseille	2:00



**NEWCASTLE:** Newcastle United's Christian Atsu, left, and West Ham United's Pablo Zabaleta battle for the ball during the English Premier League soccer match between Newcastle United and West Ham United at Saint James's Park Stadium, Newcastle, England, yesterday.—AP

### SOCCER

## RELIEF FOR BENITEZ AS NEWCASTLE CRUSH HAMMERS



**NEWCASTLE:** Newcastle United put a smile back on Rafael Benitez's face as new signing Joselu inspired their first win of the season in a 3-0 success against West Ham United yesterday. Frustrated by Newcastle owner Mike Ashley's failure to back him in the transfer market, Magpies boss Benitez hinted this week that he doesn't see his long-term future at St James' Park. Benitez has had to make do with a series of low budget deals, prompting suggestions the former Liverpool and Real Madrid manager is on the verge of quitting. But, with the transfer window closing next week, Benitez received some much-needed evidence that his squad are capable of competing in the Premier League.

Joselu scored Newcastle's first league goal of the season in the first half and late efforts from Ciaran Clark and Aleksandar Mitrovic wrapped up the points. While Benitez finished the afternoon with his spirits lifted, West Ham manager Slaven Bilic was down in the dumps after his side's third successive league defeat left them bottom of the table.

Benitez had warned Ashley in pre-season that Newcastle needed a major overhaul to turn last season's Championship winners into a team capable of surviving in the top flight. Joselu hardly seemed the answer after a disappointing two-year spell at Stoke, but the Spanish striker, signed for £5 million (\$6.4 million) earlier this month, made the most of his first start.

A midweek League Cup exit against second-tier Nottingham Forest had piled further pressure on Newcastle and Joselu couldn't lift the gloom early on when he shanked a half-chance well wide. But, after a predictably nerve-ridden opening, Joselu broke the deadlock in the 36th minute. West Ham's teenage midfielder Declan Rice squandered possession and Mikel Merino pounced, setting Christian Atsu free for a cross that Joselu poked home under pressure from two defenders.

Suddenly there was a spring in Newcastle's step and Merino's stinging strike tested West Ham goalkeeper Joe Hart. Hart had to be alert again to deny Ayoze Perez before Hammers striker Javier Hernandez, already on a booking, escaped a red card after fouling Javier Manquillo.

West Ham almost equalised when Rob Elliot kept out Aaron Cresswell's drive before Hernandez's follow up was cleared off the line by Clark. Matt Ritchie led the Newcastle response, forcing Hart to save his low shot before providing the assist for his side's second goal in the 72nd minute. Racing past Manuel Lanzini, Ritchie whipped over a pin-point cross and Clark was perfectly placed to score with a header.

Mitrovic ensured there was no late sting in the tale for Benitez, the Serb rounding Hart to slot home in the 86th minute.—AFP

## HUDDERSFIELD CONTINUE FINE START TO TOP-FLIGHT LIFE



**HUDDERSFIELD:** Huddersfield Town continued their excellent start to life in the Premier League as David Wagner's side drew 0-0 at home to Southampton yesterday. After winning their opening two matches of their first top-flight season in more than 40 years, Huddersfield lost their 100 percent record here but remain unbeaten and are still to concede a goal.

They dominated the first half without being able to find a way through a Southampton defence again deprived of want-away Dutch defender Virgil van Dijk and for whom new signing Wesley Hoedt was an unused substitute. Looking to bounce back from a midweek League Cup defeat to second-tier Wolverhampton Wanderers, the visitors had chances in the second half through Nathan Redmond and Ryan Bertrand but had to settle

for a point. Mauricio Pellegrino's men are also unbeaten three games into the new Premier League campaign with five points to their name.

Meanwhile, Brighton and Hove Albion collected their first Premier League point yesterday as Watford held on for a 0-0 draw at home despite the first-half dismissal of Miguel Britos.

Brighton had failed to register a goal or a point in their first two matches this season and twice hit the post at Vicarage Road through Anthony Knockaert and Tomer Hemed. Knockaert was fortunate to escape serious injury when Britos was sent off for a reckless lunge on the Frenchman on 24 minutes, but Brighton were unable to convert their man advantage into victory.

Nathaniel Chalobah, who in midweek became the first Hornets player since John Barnes in 1987 to receive an England call-up, flashed a drive just wide for Watford while club-record signing Jose Izquierdo came off the bench for his Brighton debut.

Knockaert forced Heurelho Gomes to tip a low shot behind with 15 minutes to play and Izquierdo went close to a dream start with his new club when his 25-yard effort brushed the roof of the net.—AFP



**HUDDERSFIELD:** Southampton's Shane Long, centre, in action with Huddersfield Town's Christopher Schindler, left, and Chris Lowe during the English Premier League soccer match between Huddersfield Town and Southampton at the John Smith's Stadium, Huddersfield, England yesterday.—AP

### BOXING

## MCGREGOR VOWS KNOCKOUT AS MOMENT OF TRUTH NEARS

**LAS VEGAS:** Mixed martial arts star Conor McGregor vowed to knock out boxer Floyd Mayweather on Friday as a horde of Irish fans descended on Las Vegas for the trash-talking rivals' cross-combat super-fight. McGregor, 29, will carry a substantial weight advantage into Saturday's 12-round boxing contest at the T-Mobile Arena after a raucous weigh-in that saw him face-off with Mayweather for the final time before fight-night. With waves of green-shirted fans in a crowd of around 6,000 roaring their support for the Irish superstar, McGregor tipped the scales at 153 pounds, well inside the 154-pound limit.

Former welterweight champion Mayweather, 40, who has emerged from a two-year retirement to take on MMA star McGregor, weighed in at 149.5 pounds. The naturally bigger McGregor—who screamed into Mayweather's face as the two men went nose-to-nose—said he expects to enter the ring at closer to 170 pounds.

Saturday's one-off bout is projected to be the richest fight in history, with Mayweather poised to earn as much as \$200 million and McGregor potentially pocketing around \$100 million. McGregor, who has never fought in a professional boxing contest, is a massive underdog for a fight, which is expected to beamed live to around 200 countries and territories across the globe.

But the former apprentice plumber from Dublin, who was unemployed four years ago, defiantly predicted he was ready to spring a monumental upset on the skillful Mayweather, one of the finest boxers in history who boasts a perfect 49-0 record.

"That's the worst shape I've ever seen him," McGregor said of Mayweather. "He looks blown out, out of shape. I'm going to breeze through him, trust me on that."

### 'FIGHTING WINS FIGHTS'

Mayweather this week taunted

McGregor with suggestions that he was struggling to make the weight. But McGregor's chiselled physique drew a line under lingering doubts about his training regime. "I'm a professional, I make weight—it's sacrifice, dedication, focus, but I make it. I'm ready," McGregor said. "I'm going to be a lot bigger than him tomorrow night, maybe closer to 170."

A nonplussed Mayweather shrugged off his weight disadvantage and once again vowed to stop McGregor inside the distance. "Weight doesn't win fights, fighting wins fights," Mayweather said. "It won't go the distance. Mark my words—I'm not worried about the scales." McGregor meanwhile basked in the adulation of his Irish fans who have poured into the Nevada desert gambling capital this week. "You can't beat us—we've already taken over," McGregor bellowed. "Las Vegas is Ireland now." An army of Irish fans poured out onto the Las Vegas strip following the weigh-in, dancing and singing in blazing hot sunshine. Tonight's bout has appalled boxing traditionalists, who have rubbished the event as a meaningless, money-grabbing, mismatch which owes more to the pantomime traditions of WWE wrestling than the noble art.

Boxing pundits, coaches and fighters have lined up to dismiss McGregor's hopes of succeeding where 49 others in Mayweather's 21-year career have failed. "Would a ping-pong player have a chance of scoring a point against Roger Federer?" was the withering verdict of veteran trainer Teddy Atlas. "It's going to be like walking through a really bad neighbourhood late at night. McGregor's going to get mugged."

The hard-nosed heavy-hitters of the gambling world agree. Today's fight is set to smash records as the most bet-upon bout in Las Vegas history. But while McGregor, a long-odds underdog, has attracted most wagers, the majority of the money is on Mayweather.—AFP