

AURIER TO ENJOY FRESH START AT SPURS: POCHETTINO

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino said yesterday he is confident new signing Serge Aurier will seize his chance after the player was dogged by disciplinary problems at Paris Saint-Germain.

The talented Ivorian right-back joined Spurs for £23 million (\$30 million, 25 million euros) from PSG on transfer deadline day last week. The deal was held up as Spurs' request for a work permit was complicated by the suspended two-month prison sentence Aurier received after an assault on a police officer outside a Paris nightclub in May 2016.

The 24-year-old was also suspended by PSG last year for making a homophobic slur against former coach Laurent Blanc in a social media video. Pochettino, speaking at the club's training centre in north London, places a strong emphasis on discipline but said he trusts Aurier to take his second chance.

"I spoke with him, of course, about different things but I'm a person that likes to move on," Pochettino said ahead of his team's Premier League match against Everton tomorrow. "I think it was good, we had a long chat. He knows very well how we are, what we expect from him and for us it's so important, not only him, every player, how they behave here in the squad.

"We need to keep the dynamic we have created. I trust him, I am confident that he can succeed here and help the team to achieve the things we want. As well as Aurier, Tottenham signed Fernando Llorente from Swansea and Pochettino believes the 32-year-old will bring a winning mentality to his young squad.

Llorente has won the World Cup and European Championship with Spain, as well as the Europa League at Sevilla and three Serie A titles with Juventus. "First of all he's a great professional. He's a world champion—he won the World Cup with

Spain - and that is the mentality that can translate to us with the experience of winning big things," Pochettino said.

"It's not easy to have the facility to sign players like Llorente. It was an amazing chance for us and I think it's fantastic he decided to sign for us." Tottenham's England star Dele Alli is still waiting to hear if he will face disciplinary action from FIFA after the midfielder was caught sticking his middle finger up during the national side's win over Slovakia on Monday.

Alli said after the match the gesture had been directed as a joke at teammate Kyle Walker. "I'm not worried," Pochettino said. "It's true it's not a fantastic gesture but it's not a big issue. It was a joke in a moment with his team-mate. I don't think it'll be a big issue with FIFA or with us."

Alli, 21, has had a number of run-ins with the football authorities and has faced calls to curb his fiery temperament. — AFP

BAYERN STAR RIBERY RELISHING PSG CLASH

BERLIN: Franck Ribery is relishing Bayern Munich's Champions League showdown against Paris Saint-Germain with the French veteran insisting he will not retire even if the Germans win this season's European title.

Bayern are at Hoffenheim tomorrow in the Bundesliga, but open their Champions League campaign at home to Anderlecht next Tuesday having also drawn Paris Saint-Germain and Celtic, who face the French league giants in Glasgow on the same day.

PSG then host Carlo Ancelotti's Bayern at the Parc des Princes on September 27 in a key showdown which could decide Group B. "Paris is a lot stronger than last season, it will be a super game. I hope we are all in top form. And we need to go out thinking 'we're Bayern. We fear no one. Wherever we play, we win'," Ribery told German daily Bild. "Anyone who fears Paris, stays in Munich."

Last month, PSG paid 222 million euros (\$266 million) for Neymar and signed French striker Kylian Mbappe on loan with an option to buy him next year in a deal that could reach 180 million euros.

Ousmane Dembele cost Barcelona 148 million euros from Borussia Dortmund as the Catalan giants seek to replace Neymar. Ribery said inflated transfer fees are a sign of the times. "I can only say that those responsible need to understand again that playing football is a joy, it's fun and you play for your shirt and for the fans," he commented.

"I don't know what I'd have been worth when I was 25, perhaps a lot of money, but it doesn't matter. "When I wanted to be a professional, my aim was to play on television, so my family could see me. I didn't play for money." The 34-year-old Ribery has been at Bayern since 2007 and his current contract expires next June.

He was part of the Bayern team which beat Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in the 2013 Champions League final in London when Arjen Robben scored the winner. However, former France star Ribery says he will not hang up his boots even if the Bavarians lift the trophy in next May's final in Kiev. "I want to win the Champions League once more. That is my dream! That is my adrenalin, my motivation," he said.

"I also can't say if this will be my last season. "I am fit and healthy, I can still play for two or three years. I love football. I don't want to sit at home, I want to play." Ribery hopes to be offered a contract extension with fellow veteran winger Robben also out of contract in June 2018. "I have been here for ten years, Arjen for eight," said Ribery. "We have always fought hard and won a lot. "I think the fans and the club can be very happy with us." — AFP



BARCELONA: In this Monday, Aug 28, 2017 file photo, French soccer player Ousmane Dembele gestures during official presentation at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona, Spain. Dembele, the 20-year-old France striker signed by Barcelona to replace Neymar is expected to make his debut in the Catalan derby against Espanyol tomorrow. — AP

SOCCER

DEMBELE GETS FIRST CHANCE TO PROVE HIS WORTH AT BARCELONA

MADRID: Ousmane Dembele is about to step into the spotlight. The 20-year-old France striker signed by Barcelona to replace Neymar is expected to make his debut in the Catalan derby against Espanyol this weekend, getting the first chance to prove his worth after being involved in the second biggest transfer in soccer history behind the Brazilian's move to Paris Saint-Germain.

"Will he be able to score on Saturday?" Barcelona posted on his website, noting that Dembele could join a list of players who debuted with goals in their Spanish league debut at the Camp Nou, including Johan Cruyff, Diego Maradona, Ronaldinho, Romario and Rivaldo.

Barcelona had already mentioned Dembele when listing details about the debut of its "greatest foreign signings," including Ronaldo, Samuel Eto'o, Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Neymar. The club brought in Dembele after losing Neymar in the world-record transfer to Paris Saint-Germain in the offseason. It called the youngster as "one of the most promising young stars in European football," a player with a "golden future."

Dembele tried to avoid comparisons to Neymar the moment

he arrived, saying that while the Brazilian was already "one of the best in the world," he is only a "young player trying to learn every day." He didn't hide he was anxious to be playing alongside Lionel Messi, whom he called "the best in history."

More than 17,000 fans were at the Camp Nou when Dembele was officially introduced to fans on Aug 28 after a transfer from Borussia Dortmund worth 105 million euros (\$125 million) plus add-ons that could reach nearly 147 million euros (\$175 million).

Barcelona initially wanted to replace Neymar with Philippe Coutinho, but Liverpool repeatedly rejected offers for the Brazil midfielder. The English club said it would only release Coutinho for 200 million euros (\$238 million), an amount Barcelona said it was not willing to pay.

Barcelona will be under pressure for Dembele to succeed because it was not able to sign any other top player to help fill the hole left by Neymar. The team reportedly also went after PSG midfielder Angel Di Maria and Juventus forward Paulo Dybala, but could not reach any deals before the end of the transfer window. — AP