

Sports

'Crazy money' - Bayern boss Hoeness plays down Sane rumours

I want to see Klopp at Bayern: Beckenbauer

BERLIN: Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness has played down his club's chances of signing Manchester City winger Leroy Sane, saying that the cost of bringing the 23-year-old to Munich would be "crazy".

Sane is yet to extend his contract at City amid rumours of an impending move to recently crowned Bundesliga champions Bayern. Yet Hoeness told Kicker magazine yesterday that he thought it was "unlikely" that Bayern would secure Sane's signature.

"I would be a bit sceptical. It is unlikely that it will work out. We are talking about crazy sums of money," he said. Last week, the Guardian reported that City had turned down an offer of more than 80 million euros (\$89.5m) from Bayern.

80 million euros was what Bayern paid for French defender Lucas Hernandez earlier this year, a club record which Hoeness has said will not be broken in the near future.

Sane's current deal runs until 2021, and City coach Pep Guardiola has said that the club want to extend the contract of the Germany international. In recent weeks, several prominent figures in German football have urged Bayern to sign Sane.

Bayern legend Lothar Matthaeus claimed he was sure the transfer would go through and German national team coach Joachim Loew said that the move would be "good for him, and good for us."

Meanwhile, German football legend Franz Beckenbauer said yesterday that he wants to see Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp in the Bayern Munich

dugout. As Germany celebrated Klopp's success in last Saturday's Champions League final, Beckenbauer told Bild newspaper that he was desperate to see the former Dortmund coach join Bundesliga champions Bayern.

"I want nothing more than to see Klopp come to Bayern one day, it would be a good fit," said the 73-year-old, who won five German titles with Bayern as a player and a coach. Klopp's first Champions League title was met with widespread celebration in the German sports media.

On Monday, Kicker magazine carried the headline "King Klopp" on its front page, and described the Liverpool manager as "the face of German football". Beckenbauer echoed those sentiments in an interview with Bild, calling Klopp "one of the best coaches in the world".

"Jurgen brought a new type of football to Germany... what he began in Dortmund, he has refined in Liverpool." Liverpool are reportedly looking to extend Klopp's contract, which currently runs until 2022. Yet Beckenbauer questioned whether 51-year-old would stay on Merseyside in the long term.

"I think that a job in England robs you of energy. As a manager in the Premier League, you have more responsibility than as a coach in the Bundesliga," he told Bild.

"With the two cup competitions and the slightly larger league, the amount of games is considerably higher than it is in Germany." — AFP



VENLO: Germany's Nico Schulz (L) and Leroy Sane warm up during a training session at the De Koel stadium yesterday in Venlo, before the team's UEFA Euro 2020 football qualifier match vs Belarus. — AFP

African 'twin sisters' tackle Chinese football together

NANJING: Tabitha Chawinga and Elizabeth Addo call one another "twin sister" and together they are making waves in Chinese women's football while also helping each other acclimatise off the pitch.

The African duo are instrumental to the ambitions of Chinese Women's Super League team Jiangsu Suning, with Chawinga banging in the goals up front and Addo pulling the strings in midfield.

The 23-year-old Chawinga is already captain of Malawi and Jocelyn Precheur, Jiangsu's French coach, is convinced that she is destined for the very top. But it hasn't been an easy path. Chawinga grew up playing football with boys in her village and was often verbally abused by onlookers who called her a prostitute, saying she was just doing it to sleep with them.

The 25-year-old Addo is Ghana's skipper and a quiet but steely presence who was raised in an area on the outskirts of the capital Accra known as "Survival City" because it is so tough. Compared with that, being professional footballers in China's league and living in Nanjing, a major city near Shanghai, is a breeze.

But as the only foreign players at Nanjing-based Jiangsu, and with just a few words of Mandarin between them, Addo and Chawinga lean heavily on one another. Neither will be involved at the Women's World Cup in France when it starts next week because Ghana and Malawi did not qualify, but they will be watching from afar. "We spend a lot of time together, walking in the streets, eat sometimes in a restaurant together if we don't want to cook," Chawinga, the chattier of the duo, told AFP. "We joke together. She's a nice girl to me, she's like my sister."



Elizabeth Addo

"It's the truth—we are just only the two foreigners, and from Africa, so we take care of each other like sisters. We are twins."

Neither had been to China before joining Jiangsu, who have lifted one domestic cup this season and are in the semi-finals of the other. Chawinga arrived from Swedish football in early 2018 and has been prolific, hitting 51 goals in 34 games to embellish her reputation as one of the best strikers in women's football.

She was joined in eastern China by attacking midfielder Addo in March this year, the two reuniting after playing together in Sweden for 18 months. Chawinga laughs at the reaction they get on the streets of Nanjing, where there are few black faces.

She said: "Many people look at us and think that maybe we are from the same parents, same house. People look at us a lot, like, 'Hey, you look similar.'" Their footballing paths also have similarities because they competed against boys when they were younger and were taunted for their love of the game.

Chawinga was a goalkeeper but aged 10 got smashed in the mouth by a boy's knee—"breaking my teeth" — and decided to play as a

striker instead. But as good as she was, Chawinga was regularly targeted for insults.

"People talk a lot. Hey, she just plays football, look at her, she goes to sleep with the boys". "But I didn't care. I knew the truth myself," she said. There were also objections from her mother. "My mum also used to fight me and say 'Don't play football, girls can't play football with the boys, stop playing football.'" "Now she's very happy for me to play football."

Addo arrived in China after stints in several countries including Sweden, the United States and Australia. She and Chawinga have lined up together half-a-dozen times so far for Jiangsu, with Addo setting up three of her friend's goals and scoring three times herself.

"When I have the ball, she knows what I'll do next," said Addo. "I know her movement when she's 'flying' and when she'll stay." Addo paused when asked about the prospect of playing against Chawinga in an international.

Then she said, smiling broadly: "That would be great, I can't wait for that day. But maybe I would mark someone else and I would tell my players, 'Hey, be careful with my twin sister.'" — AFP

growing incomes of the top English clubs. For Tottenham, who reached the Champions League final after miraculous escapes in the group stage, quarter-finals and semi-finals, the question is whether their achievement shows mounting momentum or is merely a lucky high water-mark.

The London club opened a glittering, £1 billion (\$1.26 billion) 62,000-capacity stadium to rave reviews in April. It holds 26,000 more than the old White Hart Lane and the club has landed a 10-year deal to host NFL games.

How much of that increase in revenue will be available to strengthen the squad is not clear. The club reportedly took out more than £600 million in loans to pay for the stadium. Tottenham's dynamic Argentinian coach Mauricio Pochettino has been linked with jobs at Bayern Munich and Juventus. An emotional man, he sent conflicting messages in the run-up to the Champions League final.

While Spurs face immediate challenges to make the leap to Premier League contenders, Liverpool and their coach Jurgen Klopp appear to stand a good chance of dethroning City and winning their first Premier League title for 29 years next season. Liverpool lost out to City by a single point in a thrilling race this season.

The Daily Mail's football editor Ian Ladyman said he expects Liverpool "will only get stronger from here", tweeting that the "only feasible threat is the big Spanish clubs coming for the front three, which will happen at some stage I am sure".

He was referring to envious glances aimed

at Egyptian forward Mohamed Salah, Senegalese striker Sadio Mane and Brazilian Roberto Firmino. Thirteen-time European champions Real, and Barcelona, who have won the Champions League five times, have had poor seasons by their high standards, and the response has been swift. The Madrid club are widely expected to announce the signing of Belgian midfielder Eden Hazard from Chelsea within weeks. A host of star names are expected to follow.

Barcelona have raided Ajax's precocious lineup, snapping up 22-year-old midfielder Frenkie de Jong. His Ajax teammate Matthijs de Ligt could join him in Catalonia, although Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United are also reportedly interested.

France's World Cup-winning striker Antoine Griezmann is expected to move from Atletico Madrid to Barcelona too, to bolster the ageing attack of Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez. United's wealth has rarely been matched in recent years by the same success on the pitch as they enjoyed under former manager Alex Ferguson. The Old Trafford club are expected to spend big to attempt to regain the Champions League qualification they missed out on in a calamitous season. Perennial German champions Bayern Munich have also splashed the cash to begin rebuilding their squad, investing in French defender Benjamin Pavard and Lucas Hernandez from Atletico Madrid. The problem for the Premier League's rivals is that success is attracting ever more foreign investment. — AFP

Inaugural Nations League finals a wide open contest

PORTO: Still something of a novelty, UEFA's inaugural Nations League tournament reaches its final stage with a four-team mini-competition in Portugal this week, which will be short and sharp and looks to be a wide-open contest.

It will offer Cristiano Ronaldo a chance to win a title for Portugal on home territory, 15 years after his side lost to Greece in the final of Euro 2004, which the country also hosted. England will have the chance to win their first major title since the World Cup in 1966 while the Netherlands could win their first since Euro 1988.

Switzerland could win their first ever. It may not carry the same weight as winning a World Cup or European championship but the eventual champions are unlikely to be complaining.

"The Nations League is not the most important prize that there is, but it is a trophy nevertheless that we'd like to win," said Dutch coach Ronald Koeman.

Portugal's Fernando Santos took a similar line. "The players have great passion to play for their country and this is no different," he said. "There is a title at stake and of course we want to win."

Designed to replace lukewarm friendly internationals, the competition, played between September and November last year, featured all 55 of Europe's national teams divided into four divisions—Leagues A to D—which were themselves split into four groups.

There is promotion and relegation between each league while the winners of the four League A groups earned their places in Portugal this week. It also

provides a back door for four teams to reach Euro 2020.

Despite initial scepticism over the format, it was given a generally warm reception as it matched teams of a similar standard. The finals format is quick and simple—two semi-finals, with Portugal and Switzerland meeting in Porto on Wednesday followed by England and the Netherlands in Guimaraes on Thursday, and the final in Porto on June 9.

'LACKLUSTRE' RONALDO?

Hosts Portugal start as slight favourites with Ronaldo, their all time leading scorer and most-capped player, eager to make up for what by his extraordinary standards could almost be described as a lacklustre first season at Juventus.

The 34-year-old scored "only" 28 goals and had to be content with adding just a Serie A title to his medals' collection. Portugal's 'old guard' is still in place, with Pepe holding the defence together at 36, but there has also been the welcome emergence of some promising newcomers such as 19-year-old Benfica forward Joao Felix.

England have managed to keep their momentum going after reaching the semi-finals at the World Cup last year, finishing ahead of Spain and Croatia in their group and making an emphatic start to their Euro 2020 qualifying campaign with five goals in each of their first two games.

The Dutch finished ahead of Germany and France to qualify and appear to be on the way back after missing the last European championship and World Cup. Switzerland surprisingly pipped Belgium for their place, with a stunning 5-2 win over the World Cup semi-finalists, and are looking to make the transformation from a team that is always difficult to beat to one considered title contenders. "Our goal should be to win the tournament," said coach Vladimir Petkovic. — Reuters

Premier League has Europe in its grip

PARIS: Liverpool's victory in the Champions League could usher in a new era of English dominance of European competition—but titans Real Madrid will not take the challenge lying down. The 2-0 win for Jurgen Klopp's side over Tottenham Hotspur in Madrid on Saturday was the culmination of a week of all-English European finals, after Chelsea had thrashed Arsenal 4-1 in Baku to lift the Europa League trophy. The Premier League's European rivals have taken note of the English dominance this season, with many seeing it as evidence of the Premier League's overwhelming financial power created by TV contract receipts that put other leagues in the shade.

A report from accountants KPMG last month underlined that financial muscle, with six English teams ranked among the top 10 European clubs that generate the greatest revenue. Manchester United were runners-up to top-placed Real Madrid. Abu Dhabi-backed Manchester City, the newly crowned Premier League champions, were in fifth place, ahead of Russian-owned Chelsea, US-backed Liverpool, and Arsenal, with Tottenham in ninth spot.

The looming prospect of Brexit does not yet seem to have had a detrimental effect on the

Reyes laid to rest in Spain after car crash

UTRERA: Hundreds of mourners attended the funeral in Spain yesterday of former Real Madrid and Arsenal forward Jose Antonio Reyes, who was killed in a weekend car crash. Reyes' coffin, draped in the flag of his boyhood club Sevilla, was carried through the streets of his hometown of Utrera before the funeral service at a local church.

The 35-year-old former Spanish international died Saturday in an accident on the main road from Sevilla to Utrera. The crash and resultant fireball also claimed the life of one of his cousins while another passenger was still in hospital Monday, according to police.

Images from the scene of the crash show the burnt-out car flipped on its roof. Daily newspaper Diario de Sevilla reported Reyes was driving over 200 kilometres (125 miles) per hour at the time of the accident while sports daily Mundo Deportivo, citing a police

report, said he was going at 237 kilometres per hour.

Contacted by AFP, a spokesman for Spain's Guardia Civil police force which is investigating the accident declined to comment on the reports. On the day of the crash former Spanish international Santiago Canizares criticised Reyes, who reportedly owned a fleet of high-powered cars, for driving at high speed. "Speeding is a reprehensible attitude. There were victims in the accident aside from the driver. Reyes does not deserve a tribute like a hero. Nevertheless I regret what happened and that I pray for their souls," tweeted Canizares, who was part of Spain's national team at the same time as Reyes.

A minute's silence was held for Reyes before Saturday's Champions League final in Madrid between Liverpool and Tottenham. Reyes shot to fame at Sevilla and was snapped up by Arsenal, where he was part of the unbeaten 'Invincibles' who won the 2003-2004 Premier League title. Reyes later had spells at Real and Atletico Madrid.

He won the Europa League five times, twice with Atletico Madrid and three times in his second spell at Sevilla. Reyes played 21 times for Spain between 2003 and 2006, scoring four goals. He also won domestic league titles with Real Madrid and Benfica. — AFP