

## Sports

# Cavani undecided over future at Man Utd, says Solskjaer

## Arteta says Aubameyang 'totally' committed to Arsenal

LONDON: Edinson Cavani remains unsure about his Manchester United future beyond the end of the Premier League season, manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said on Friday. The 34-year-old Uruguayan international arrived at Old Trafford as a free agent in October on a deal until the end of the campaign with the option of a further year.

Unlike most extension clauses it has to be agreed by both parties before it can be triggered and there is speculation that Cavani could move to Argentine giants Boca Juniors. Solskjaer said he had discussed the matter with the former Paris Saint-Germain forward.

"I've kept in touch with Edi, of course, and we keep an open dialogue," said Solskjaer. "He's still unsure what he wants to do next season, which I find fine. It's not been an easy year either for him or the rest of the world this season, so he still wants time to make his mind up."

Cavani came off the bench in Thursday's 2-0 Europa League quarter-final first-leg win at Granada, making his 28th appearance of a season marred by injuries. He also served a three-match Football Association ban for using a racial term in a social media post. The striker apologized for any unintentional offence caused.

Solskjaer believes Cavani, who has scored seven times for United, will finish the season strongly despite the potential distractions. "I'm very sure that we'll get a good version of Edinson for the rest of the season," said the Norwegian. "He knows that this is the business end of the season, where we fight for the Europa League trophy and we can see the end line in the league. He's been so positive in and around the place, he's been great to have."

Second-placed United face Tottenham today, eager to atone for a 6-1 hammering earlier in the

season in a match in which Anthony Martial was sent off. "I think the players will remember that game with a lot of pain and their pride has been hurt, our professional pride's been hurt," said Solskjaer. "The way and the manner we lost is not ourselves and we know that. We gave ourselves a difficult game by having 10 men. Pre-season was short and we weren't up to the standard required, but we were so poor and I'm pretty, pretty sure we'll see some players wanting to prove that we're better than that."

### 'Totally' committed

Elsewhere, Mikel Arteta said striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is "totally" committed to Arsenal even though he has been in and out of the team and he played down comparisons with the Mesut Ozil situation.

Club captain Aubameyang signed a lucrative new three-year contract last year but has struggled for form this season and was dropped for last month's north London derby after arriving late. The Gabon international, 31, has scored just nine goals in 25 Premier League appearances this season compared with 22 goals last term.

His situation at the Emirates has been compared with that of Ozil, who under-performed despite being on huge wages before eventually being exiled by Arteta. The Arsenal boss, though, said he did not see the merits of comparing the two cases.

"I'm always positive about the future but once you think about things that happen in the past or compare different situations and personalities, I won't do that," he said. Asked whether Aubameyang was committed to the Gunners' cause, Arteta, whose side are languishing in mid-table in the English top-flight, added: "Totally."



GRANADA: Granada's Venezuelan midfielder Yangel Herrera reacts next to Manchester United's Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani (right) after missing a goal opportunity during the UEFA Europa League football match between Granada FC and Manchester United at the Nuevo Los Carmenes stadium in Granada on Thursday. —AFP

The forward came on as a late second-half substitute in the 1-1 draw with Slavia Prague in the Europa League quarter-final first-leg clash on Thursday, setting up Nicolas Pepe's goal. Arteta was pleased with Aubameyang's impact off the bench.

"In the Europa League everyone has contributed

in different ways, the whole squad has been involved and yesterday's role for him (was) he was sat on the bench and to make an impact and he made an impact," said the Spaniard. "He assisted Nico and should have scored a tap-in with his left foot and that's what the players have to do when they come in." —AFP

## Mbappe 'focused' on PSG amid Real Madrid rumors: Pochettino

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe is not distracted by rumors of a possible move to Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain coach Mauricio Pochettino insisted on Friday. The France World Cup-winning superstar has long been linked with an eventual move to Madrid, who courted him as a teenager before he signed for first club Monaco. His current contract with PSG is due to expire at the end of next season.

The player and PSG are in talks over a possible extension, but Spanish television station Cuatro this week claimed Mbappe wants to move to Real and has decided not to sign a new deal in Paris. The story was denied by sources close to Mbappe, who spoke to French broadcaster RMC Sport.

"This is something we are accustomed to at the top level, when we talk about big clubs and great players like

Kylian, there are always rumors," Pochettino told reporters in a press conference on Friday. "The most important thing is that Kylian is at peace and is focused on helping the team to achieve its objectives. He is so mature despite his youth and both he and the club are focused on trying to reach an agreement so that Kylian stays here for a long time. That is what the club wants. We can't control everything that happens outside the club but all that stuff has no impact on the team."

Mbappe, 22, scored twice as PSG beat Bayern Munich 3-2 away in the first leg of their Champions League quarter-final tie on Wednesday. The sides meet again in the return leg on Tuesday. Before that PSG travel to Strasbourg on Saturday in a key game in the Ligue 1 title race. Mbappe is the top scorer in Ligue 1 this season with 20 goals from 26 appearances. —AFP



MUNICH: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring the 2-3 goal during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final first leg football match against FC Bayern Munich in Munich, southern Germany, on April 7, 2021. —AFP

## France edge England in women's friendly before US clash

CAEN: France defeated England 3-1 in a women's international friendly on Friday in a perfect confidence boost ahead of tackling world champions United States next week. Sandy Baltimore, in the 32nd minute, Viviane Asseyi, with a 63rd-minute penalty, and a strike from Marie-Antoinette Katoto eight minutes from time secured the win. However, the French suffered a nervy conclusion when Fran Kirby scored with a 79th-minute penalty before Keira Walsh hit the post two minutes later. France next meet the United States in Le Havre on Tuesday. —AFP



CAEN: France's players celebrate after scoring a goal during the friendly football match between France and England, at the Michel d'Ornano Stadium in Caen, northwestern France on Friday. —AFP

## Parker insists Fulham still have 'fighting chance' to beat drop

LONDON: Adama Traore grabbed a stoppage-time winner as Wolves beat Fulham 1-0 at Craven Cottage on Friday to send the Londoners closer to relegation from the Premier League. In added time, Traore ran down the right before firing home to secure his side's first victory since mid-February.

However, Fulham boss Scott Parker insists his team can still beat the drop. "We find ourselves in this position where we are, but we've got a fighting chance because of what you see at the end of the game, a team and a group of players that are desperate," he said. "We will continue, painful, hurt but as always you get your guard up and you come out swinging, and that's what we'll do."

For Traore, it was an evening to remember as it was his first goal in the Premier League since December 2019. "I am so happy. We needed the points, it has been tough for us," said the Spaniard. "I have been working hard through the weeks, trying to run in behind and mix the games up. If I can help the team the best I can I will. I trust in my quality."

Wolves striker William Jose had earlier been



LONDON: Wolverhampton Wanderers' Spanish midfielder Adama Traore controls the ball during the English Premier League football match between Fulham and Wolverhampton Wanderers at Craven Cottage in London on Friday. —AFP

denied his first goal for the club when his header in first-half injury time was ruled out for an offside by Daniel Podence following a VAR review. Fulham have lost their last four league games with their most recent win a stunning victory over champions

Liverpool at Anfield on March 7. They remain third from bottom, three points behind Newcastle who have played two games fewer. Wolves are 12th and seemingly safe in the Premier League for another season. —AFP

## Enyimba hope rising star Iwuala can cure 'travel sickness'

JOHANNESBURG: Enyimba hope exciting prospect Anayo Iwuala can help cure the 'travel sickness' that afflicts the Nigerian team when they face Entente Setif in Algeria today in the CAF Confederation Cup. The west Africans have lost three straight CAF away matches this season, and are about to confront opponents who must win to retain any hope of reaching the quarter-finals.

Capped for the first time by Nigeria last month, winger Iwuala, 22, enhanced his growing reputation with a brilliant dribble and perfect pass to create the winner when Enyimba beat Setif in Aba last weekend. Here, AFP Sport spotlights matchday 4 in the African equivalent of the UEFA Europa League, with Raja Casablanca of Morocco poised to become the first qualifiers for the knockout phase.

### Group A

Twice African champions Setif have fallen far short of expectations, collecting only one point from a possible nine in what is widely regarded as the toughest of the four sections. Recent home form offers little encouragement to the Algerian Black Eagles as they failed to score in draws with Asante Kotoko of Ghana, in a pre-group playoff, and Orlando Pirates of South Africa. Should leaders Enyimba falter in Setif, a Pirates team captained by centre-back Happy Jele will move to the top if the win in Soweto against Al Ahly Benghazi, a club they held in Libya last Sunday.

### Group B

Title-holders Renaissance Berkane of Morocco are in trouble, trailing Coton Sport of Cameroon and JS Kabylie of Algeria with two away matches to come. The first of those is against six-time CAF title winners Kabylie, who forced a goalless draw in Berkane six days ago despite having Malik Raiah red-carded in the second half. Coton won away to bottom club NAPSA Stars of Zambia in matchday 3 thanks to an Abdouraman Daman goal and look set to garner another three points in Garoua.

### Group C

This is tightest section with only two points separating leaders and record three-time Confederation Cup winners CS Sfaxien of Tunisia from bottom side Salitas of Burkina Faso. Sfaxien and Etoile Sahel failed to score in a Tunisian derby last weekend with the poor recent form of their leading scorers, Firas Chaouat and Ivorian Souleymane Coulibaly respectively, continuing. Salitas have been forced to switch a win-or-bust west African showdown with Jaraaf of Senegal to Benin because the stadium they use in Ouagadougou has been declared unsuitable for international games by CAF.

### Group D

Former Confederation Cup title-holders Raja can clinch a last-eight slot if they complete a double over 2020 runners-up Pyramids of Egypt, having won at home last Sunday. No one will be more determined to impress in this match than 37-year-old Pyramids goalkeeper Sherif Ekramy, whose blunder led to him conceding an own-goal and gifting Raja the lead in Casablanca. African debutants Namungo of Tanzania have struggled in such high-quality company, failing to score when losing three matches in a row, and another loss looms away to Nkana of Zambia. —AFP