

Liverpool pulled off £6m transfer trick only to miss out on Cristiano Ronaldo

Sean Bradbury 5 days ago



It was a deal that might have made Michael Edwards proud.

On this day in 2001, Liverpool pulled off a transfer trick that planned for campaigns to come and was years ahead of its time.

Gerard Houllier secured the double signing of young 'gems' Florent Sinama-Pongolle and Anthony Le Tallec for a combined £6m fee from Le Havre.

The two hotly-tipped teens would stay in France for an extra couple of seasons as part of the agreement.

But the path was set for them to make their way to Anfield to link up with the Reds.

As a Liverpool spokesperson said at the time: "They will sign in 2003 and, until then, both will remain contracted to Le Havre.

"Although we have not bought into the French club and there is no financial package involved, this deal is a technical alliance which should benefit both sides."

The nature of 'feeder clubs' and transfers arranged in advance is now part of the modern football landscape.

Liverpool, for example, triggered Naby Keita's release clause in August 2017 but his official signing did not kick in until the following summer.

Yet the forward-thinking nature of the purchases back in 2001 was something novel.

Other sides such as Manchester United and Arsenal had experimented with continental ties, but on a smaller scale with mostly loan-based activity.

This represented a bold attempt to extract early value and keep Liverpool at the top of the game further down the line.

A similar strategy is partly employed now under FSG and Jurgen Klopp - with the likes of Harvey Elliott, Billy Koumeto, Sepp van den Berg and Ki-Jana Hoever recruited at the outset of their careers with the future in mind.

The nature of such preemptive moves means they will not always work.

Pongolle went on to play 66 times for Liverpool, scoring nine goals. Le Tallec netted once in 32 senior appearances.

There is an argument that the reward did not merit the risk in either case.

But Houllier and other Anfield decision makers involved will have few regrets at rolling the dice. The principle was an admirable one.

And as all Kopites know, the French duo went on to play crucial roles on the road to the Champions League triumph of 2005.

However, there is another chapter to the story which has certainly not aged well.

In 2003, Liverpool decided not to pursue interest in Cristiano Ronaldo before his £12m move to United.

As Houllier has previously explained: "I saw him in the Toulon Under-21 tournament and we went for him. But we had a wage scale and we weren't paying the sort of salary he wanted.

"Then Manchester United played a friendly against Sporting Lisbon and all their boys said to Sir Alex Ferguson: 'You have to sign him'.

"But I agreed with not breaking the wage structure. I thought it would cause problems in our dressing room."

And former assistant boss Phil Thompson admitted the arrivals of Le Tallec and Pongolle were also a factor.

He said: "We had just signed Florent Sinama-Pongolle and Anthony Le Tallec, both on far less than Ronaldo's aspirations.

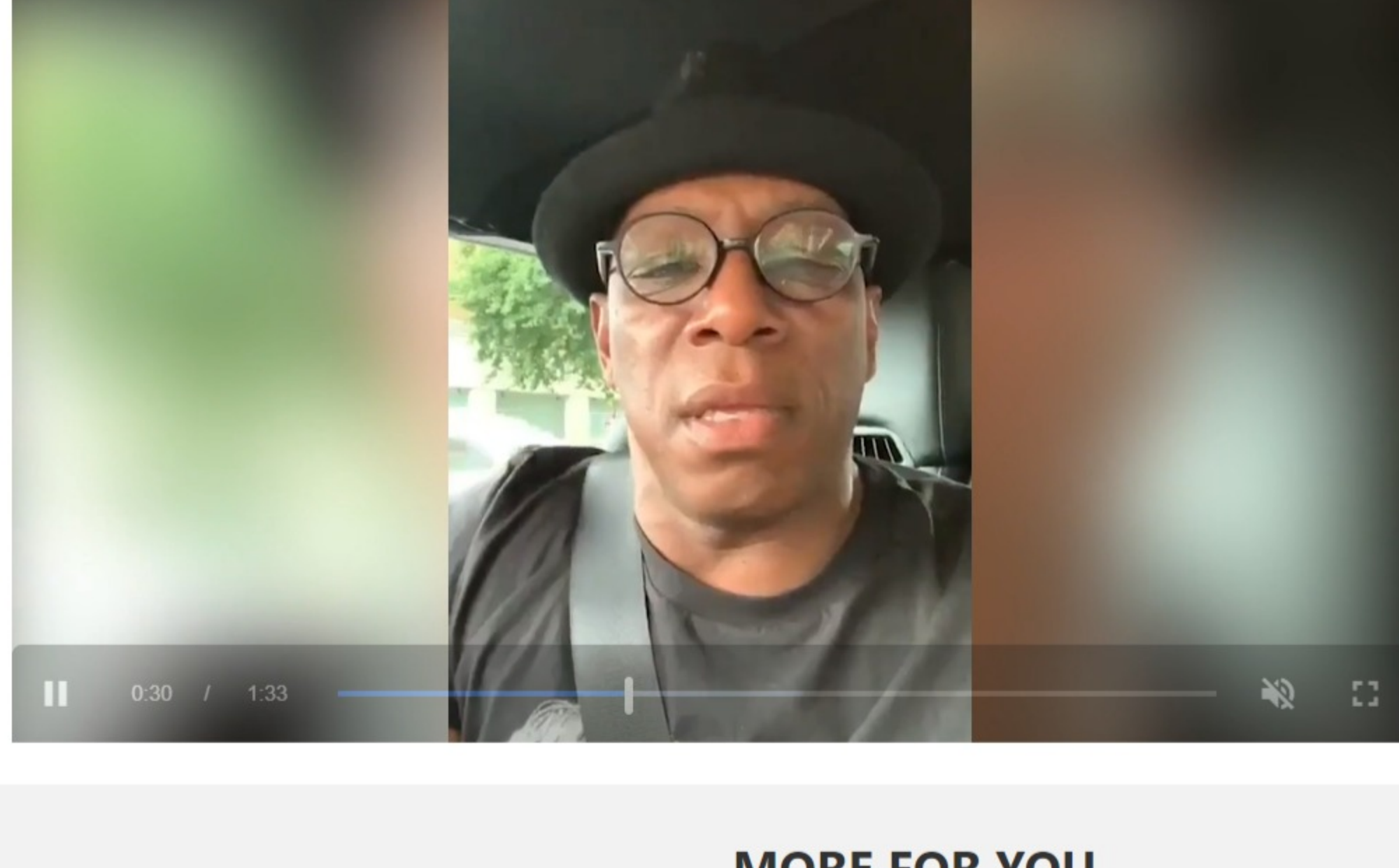
"And we would have had anarchy if the other players had found out how much we were considering paying for an 18-year-old kid.

"We looked for a compromise. Ten days later I was sitting in a lounge at Anfield having some lunch and looking at the big TV screen.


"Up came the news United had signed Ronaldo from Lisbon for £12.2m. Gerard and myself nearly choked on our food!"

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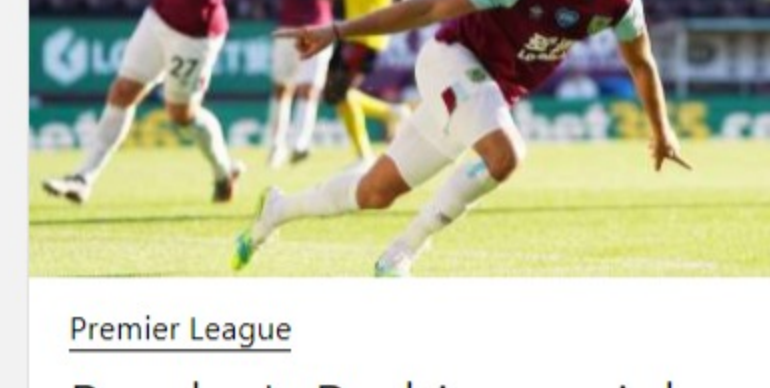


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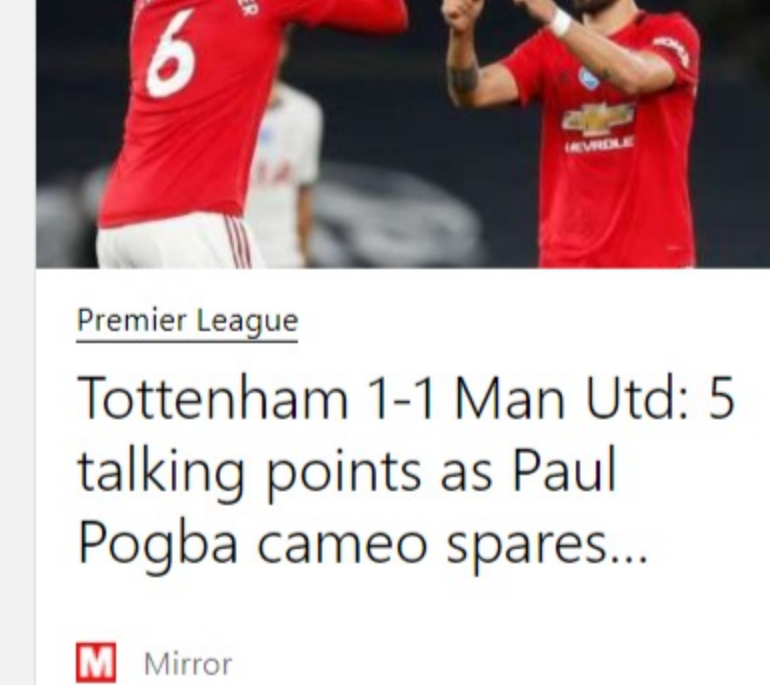
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Wolves strike late to beat Hammers

The day after Premier League football was suspended in March, Karen Brady called for the season to be made null and void. It was easy to see why during Wolverhampton Wanderers' 2-0 victory over West Ham United at the London Stadium. Even though David Moyes's team began the restarted campaign one place above the relegation zone, the

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League Two will not resume following the coronavirus pandemic, with the English Football League confirming that clubs have voted in favour of ending the 2019/20 season with immediate effect and determining the final standings via a points-per-game formula. Swindon Town have been

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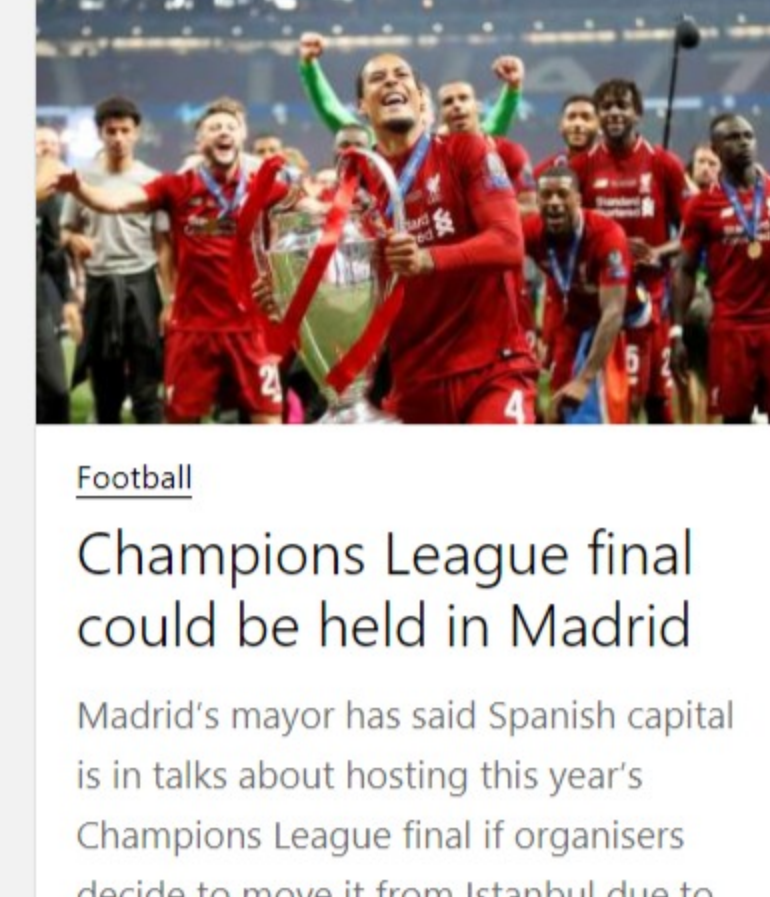
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Southgate: Euro 2020 delay could improve England's chances

England manager Gareth Southgate has said Euro 2020's coronavirus-enforced delay until next summer may improve his team's chances at the tournament. The competition was set to begin today (9 June), but will instead take place in 2021. It will be held across 12 European cities as originally planned. "At one

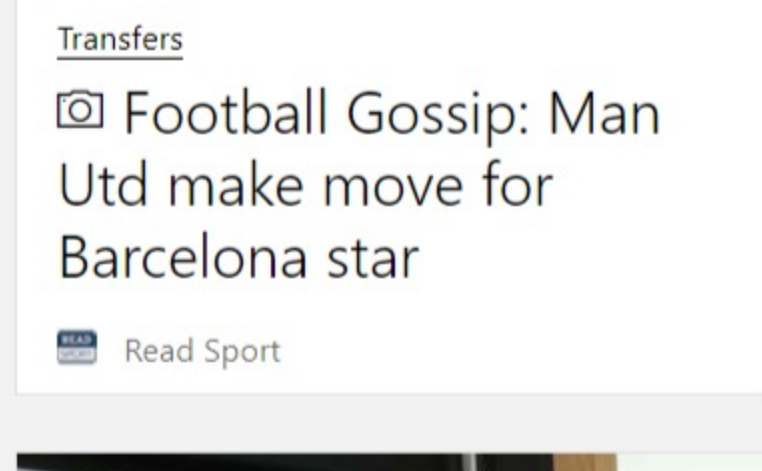
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Champions League final could be held in Madrid

Madrid's mayor has said Spanish capital is in talks about hosting this year's Champions League final if organisers decide to move it from Istanbul due to the coronavirus crisis. European football's biggest game was scheduled to be played at Istanbul's Ataturk Stadium on May 30 until the competition was postponed at the last-

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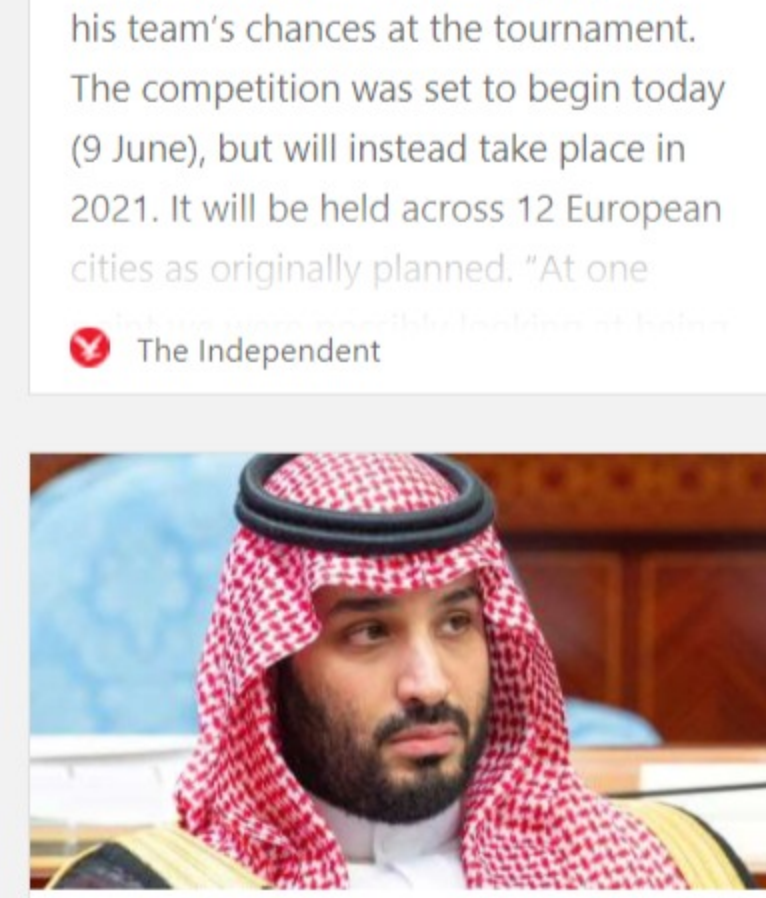
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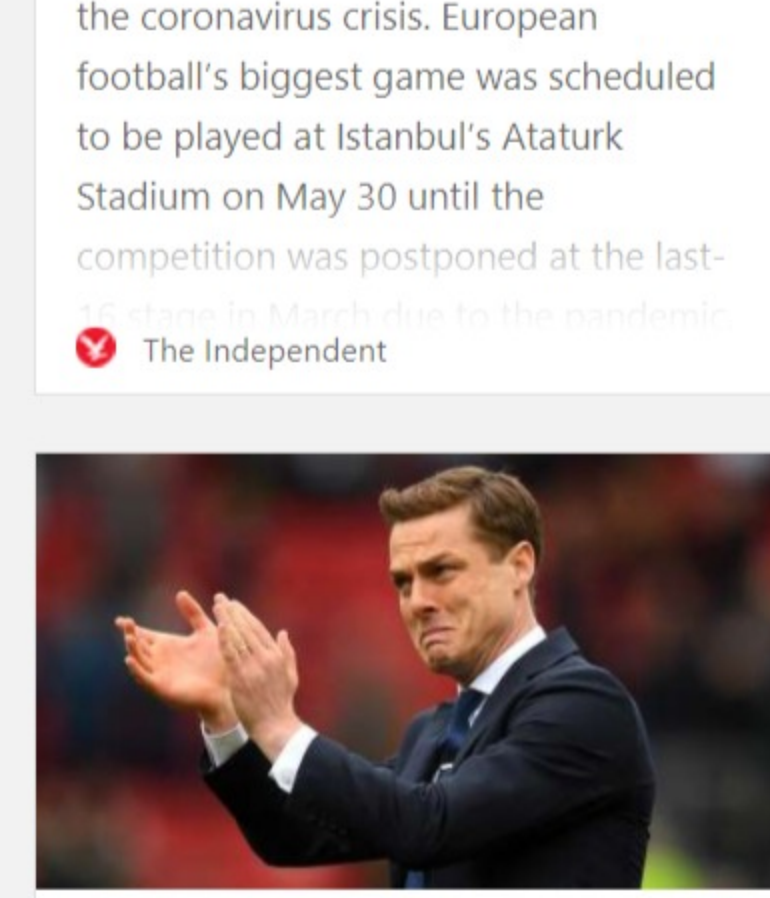
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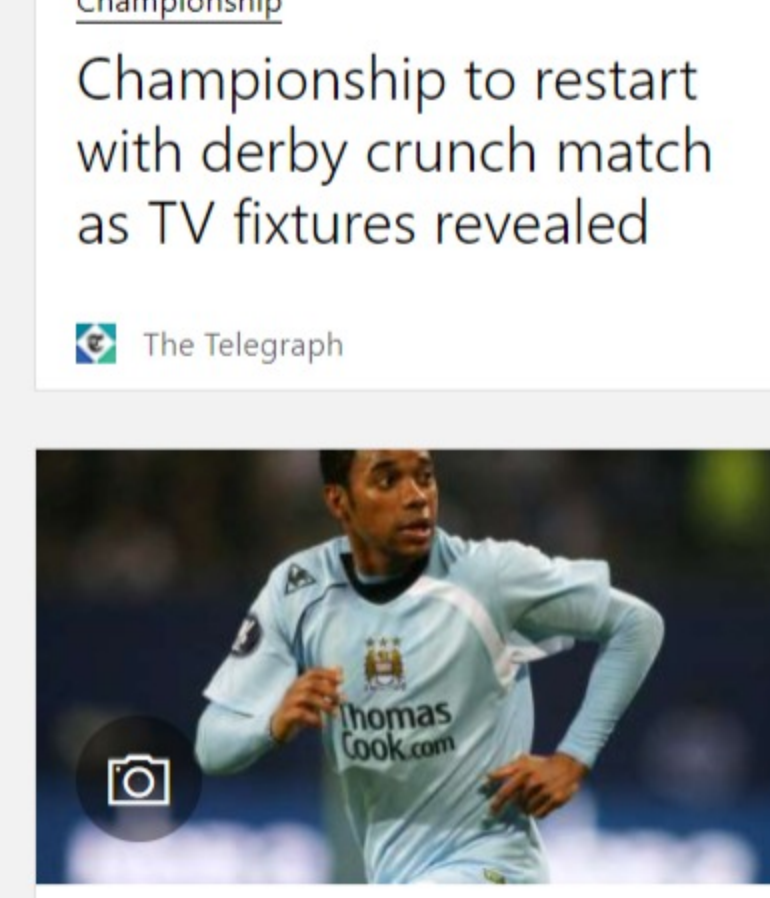
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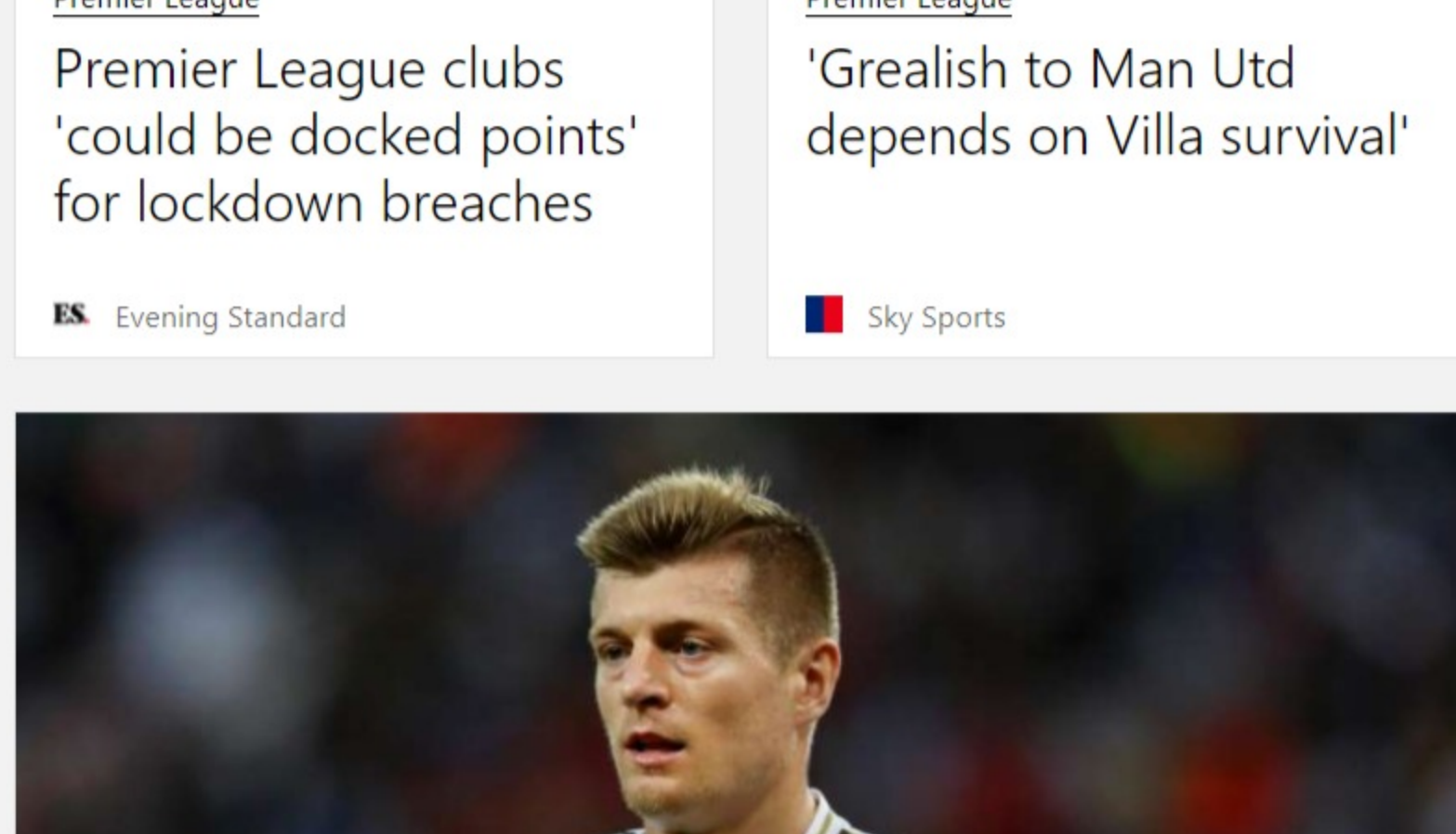
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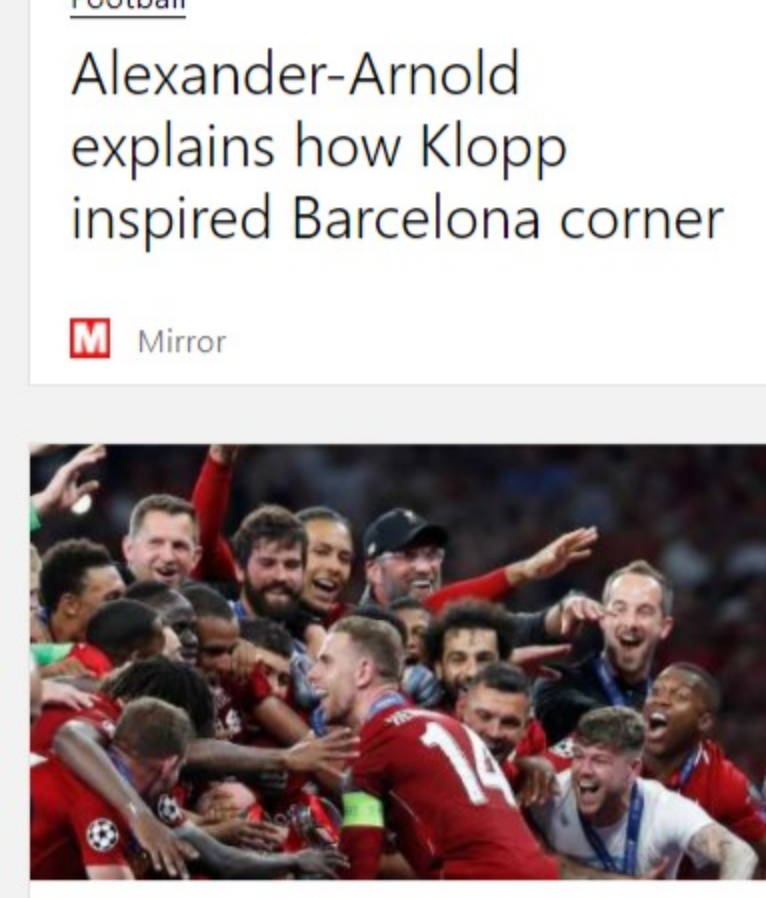
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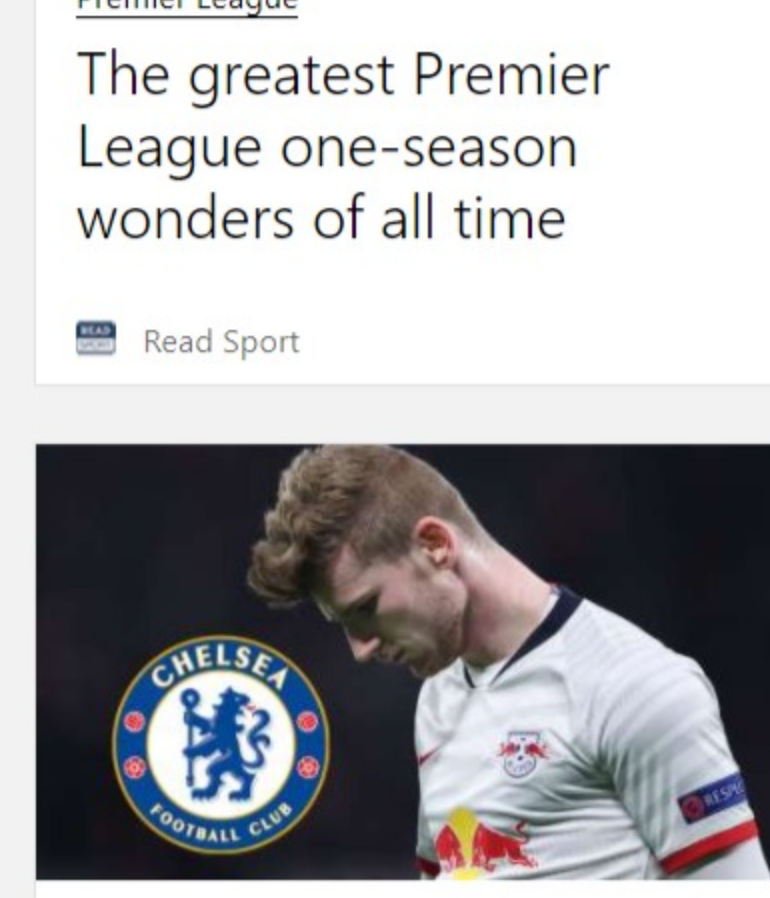
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Champions League
Champions League 'set for mini-tournament in Portugal'

The conclusion of the Champions League season could be moved to Lisbon for a mini-tournament in August, according to reports. The competition's finale was originally scheduled for May 30 in Istanbul before the coronavirus pandemic put sport across the globe on pause. With 77 fixtures left in this

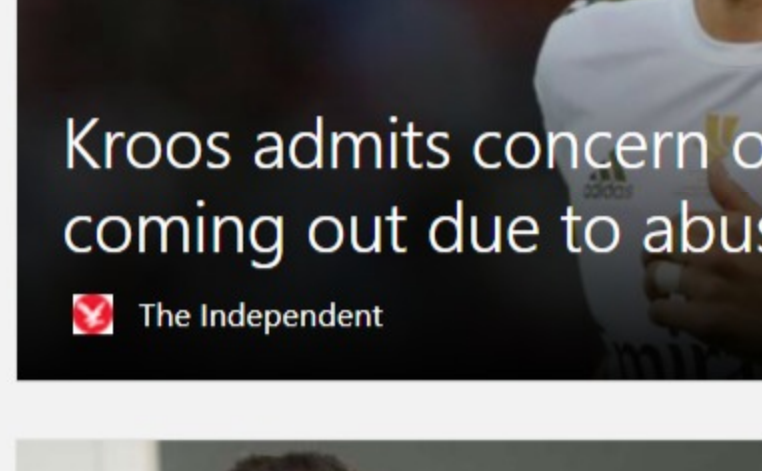
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Premier League
Premier: Werner not good enough for Liverpool

RB Leipzig striker Timo Werner has been told he is not good enough for Liverpool as he prepares to join Chelsea this summer. Jurgen Klopp was widely expected to make a move for the 24-year-old, only for rival Frank Lampard is swoop in and look to trigger Werner's £53million release clause. Robbie Fowler is not surprised by Klopp's hesitance with signing Werner for the north-

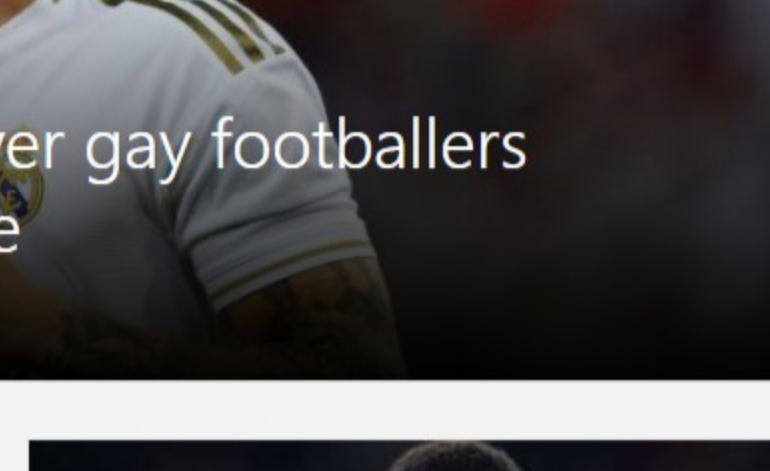
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Football admits doubts over return of Soccer Saturday

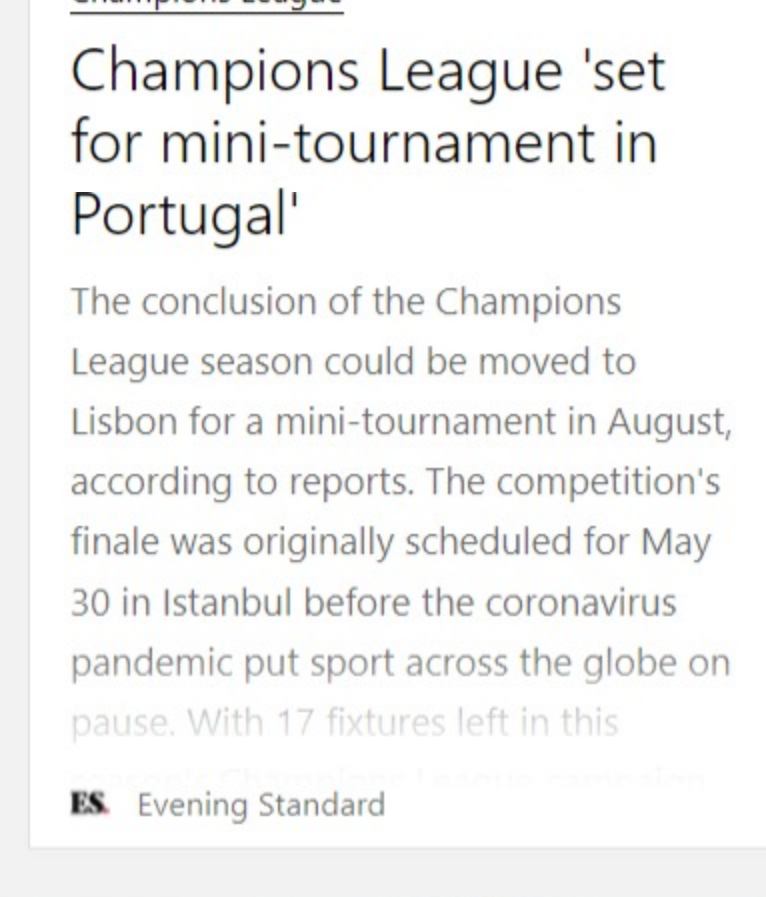
March 7 was the last Saturday of normality in the world of English football. Liverpool won, Norwich didn't, and, after a particularly mundane set of seven Premier League fixtures, Jeff Stelling said we'd do it all again, same time, same place, next week. "Goodnight, see you next week at

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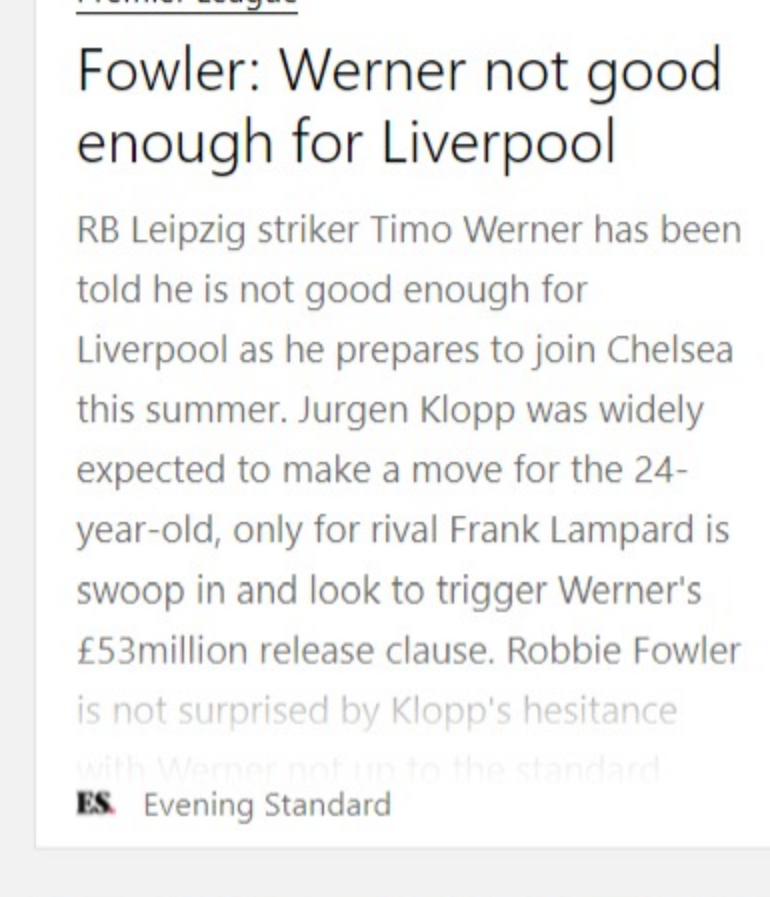
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Football gossip: Liverpool make Adama move

As various leagues across the continent are now returning to action, thoughts will be split between getting the current season completed and also the upcoming transfer window. Even during the delay in action, the speculation regarding the futures of players across the world didn't show any signs of slowing down and that continues to be

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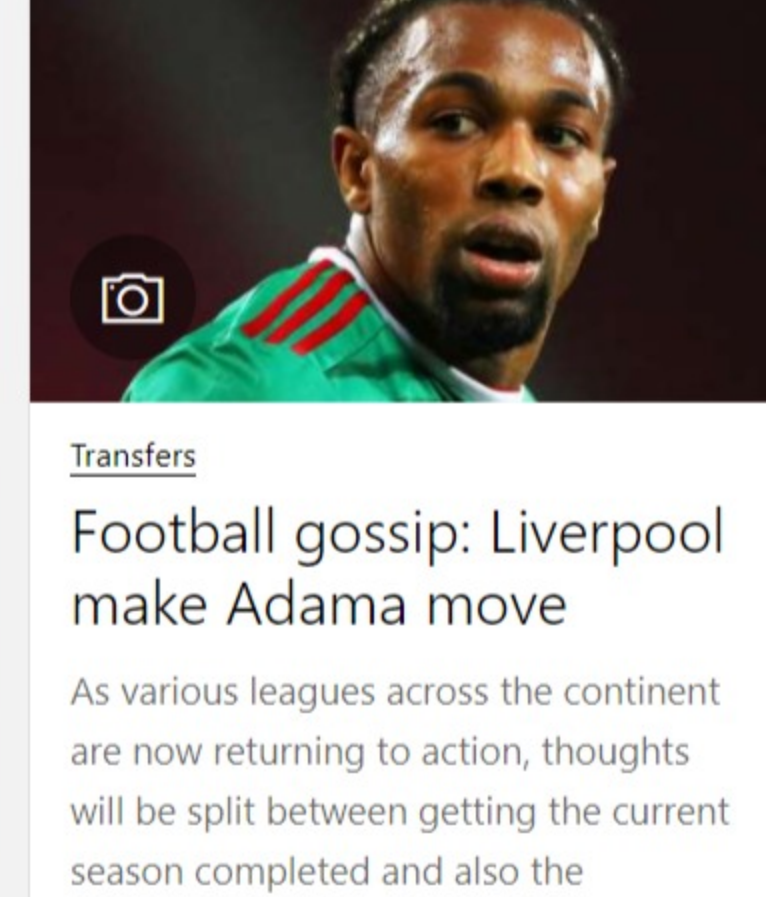
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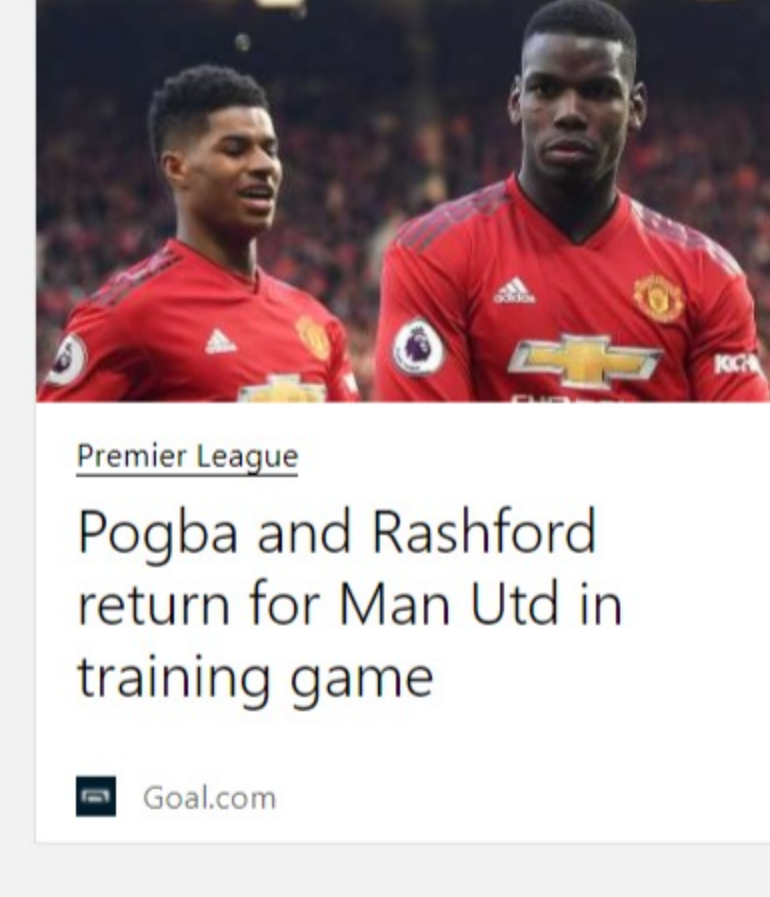
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Premier League: Liverpool make Adama move

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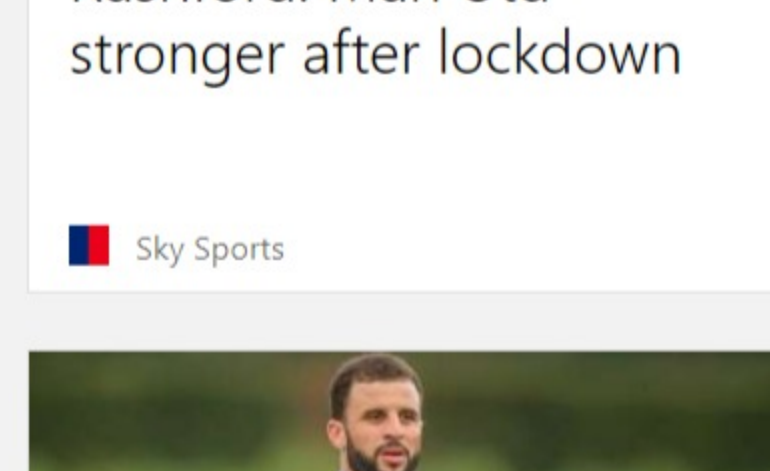
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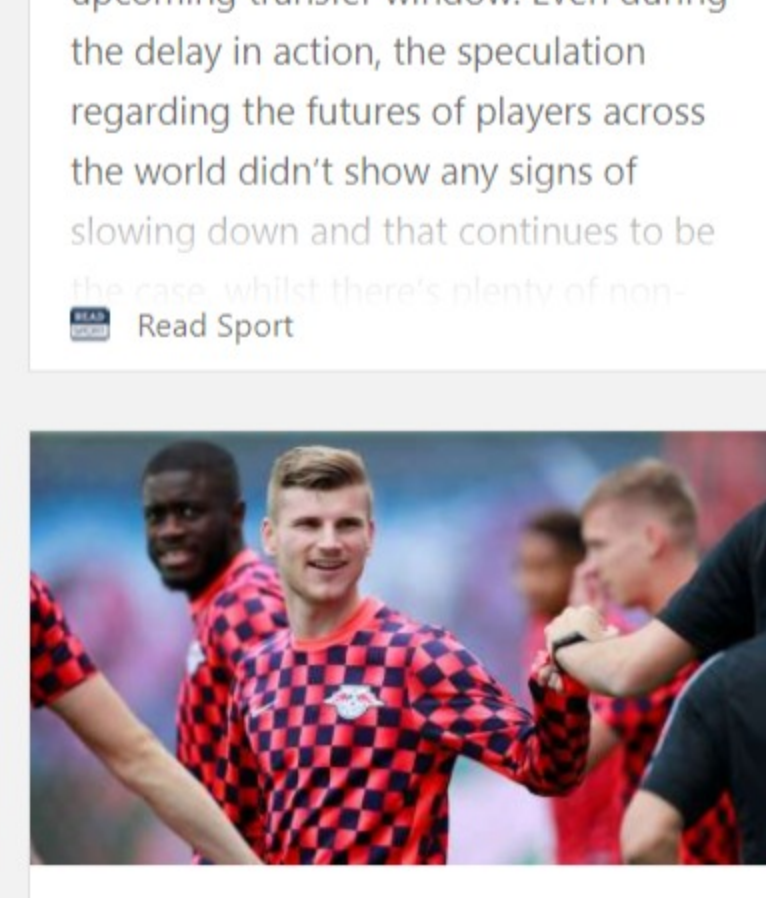
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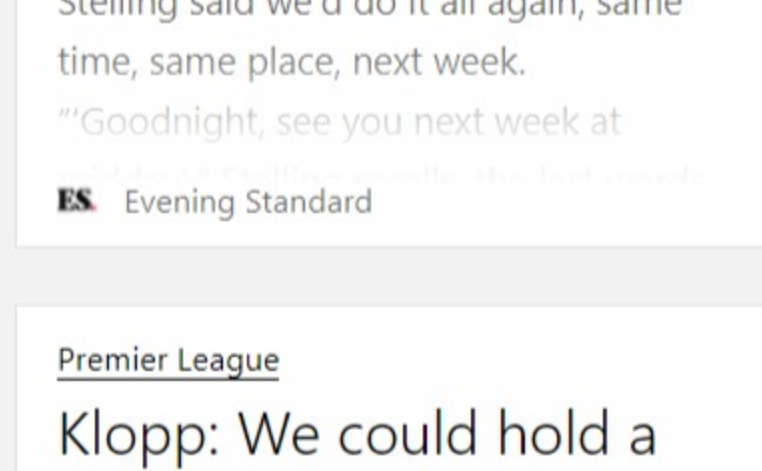
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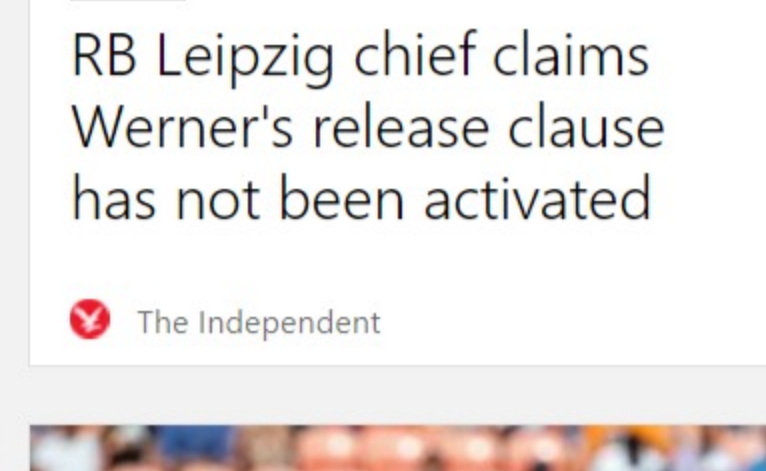
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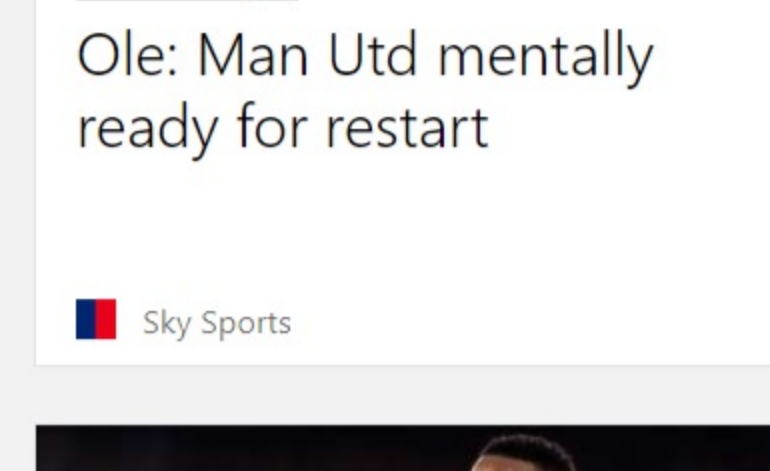
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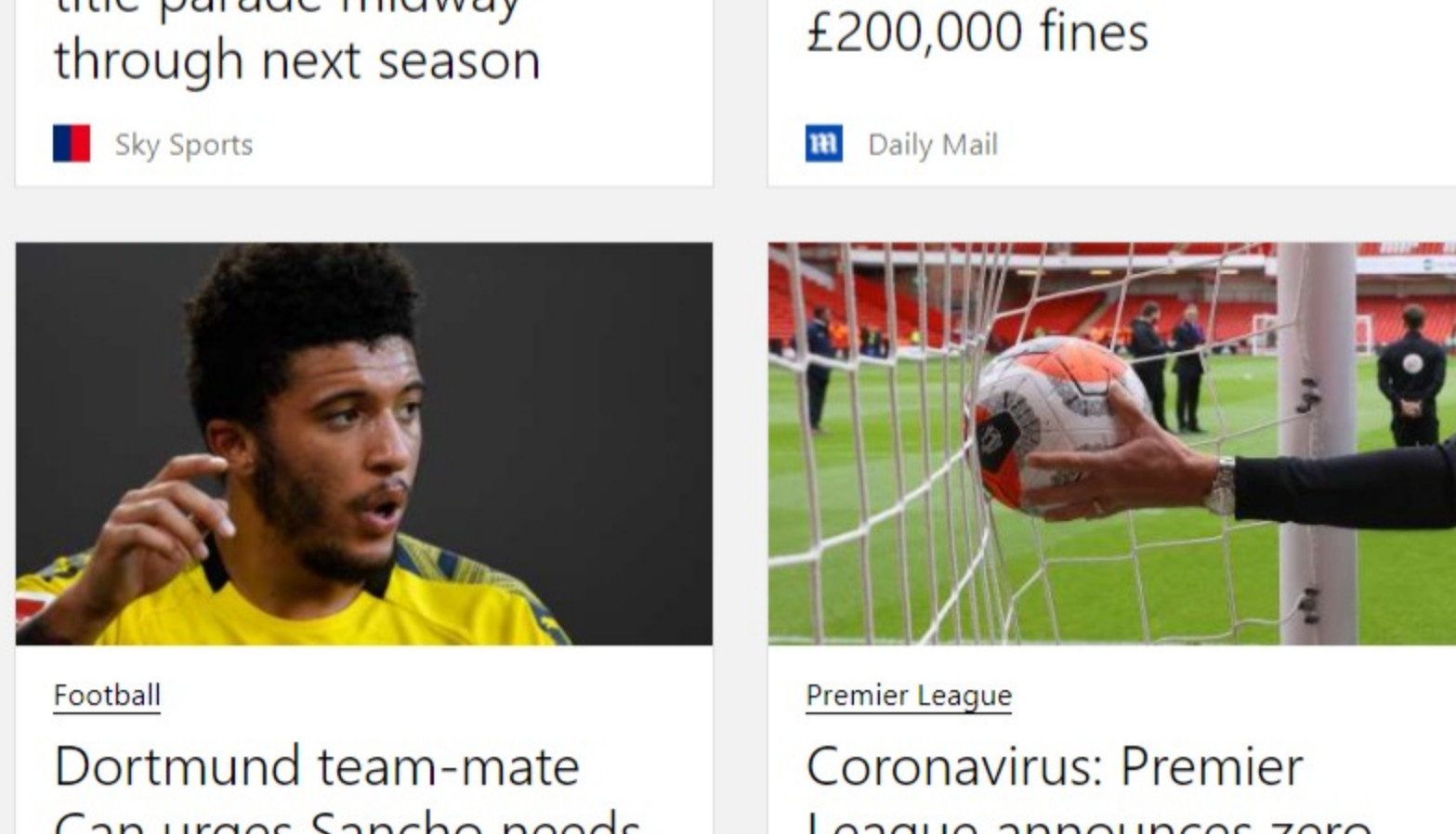
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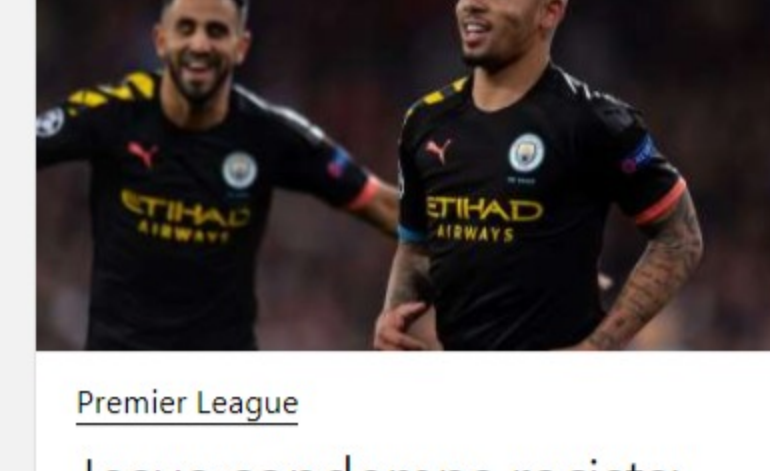
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