

## Barton faces 10-game FA ban over 2007 assault on team-mate Dabo



Dabo

By Colin Young Last

Newcastle midfielder Joey Barton faces a 10-match ban for his attack on former Manchester City team-mate Ousmane Dabo after the FA yesterday charged him with violent conduct.

He could also be hit with a fine of more than £75,000 for the training ground assault on Dabo, who was left unconscious.

As he continued his battle for fitness at Newcastle's training ground on Thursday, Barton may have believed his troubled past was finally behind him. But the FA hope the disciplinary panel will throw the book at the 25-year-old when they rule on the case and believe a 10-match suspension would be a conservative punishment.

Paolo Di Canio was banned for 11 matches when at Sheffield Wednesday in 1998 for pushing over referee Paul Alcock and Manchester United's Eric Cantona was suspended for nine months after attacking a fan at Crystal Palace in 1995.

Barton, the one-time England international, has been hit by the FA charge following his release from prison 74 days into a six-month sentence for a separate 'drunken and vicious' assault.

Astonishingly, Newcastle, who have faced widespread condemnation for their decision to stand by Barton, contested the announcement from Soho Square.

In a statement the club said they would seek clarification from the FA 'as to why the decision has been reached now, given the incident occurred nearly 15 months ago. Joey will be seeking a personal hearing'.

They will be told that the FA did not feel they were in a position to consider charges in relation to the incident until Barton's court case had been heard and his prison term had ended.

Barton was jailed after he was caught on CCTV in Liverpool knocking an unnamed victim to the ground, before straddling him and punching him up to 20 times. Moments later, the player attacked 16-year-old Jordan Spencer, punching him in the mistaken belief that the youth had assaulted his cousin.

At the time of that assault Barton was on bail for the attack on Dabo. While serving time in Strangeways, he pleaded guilty to the Dabo attack. He was given a suspended, four-month jail sentence and 200 hours of unpaid community work.

Barton was with England striker and club captain Michael Owen at the club's training ground on Thursday, while their team-mates are in Majorca preparing for two matches against Hertha Berlin and Real Mallorca.

Manager Kevin Keegan refused to answer questions about Barton but he did admit that Owen is absent because he has a fresh calf strain.

# Dirty tricks over Madrid move put Ronaldo in a hot spot

By Peter Fergusson and Simon Cass



Ferguson

Ronaldo

The latest attempt to drive a wedge between Cristiano Ronaldo and Manchester United began to unravel on Thursday night, just when it seemed the player was heading for an Old Trafford showdown next week with Sir Alex Ferguson.

It was the latest twist to the summer-long saga of the Portugal winger's battle either to quit United for Real Madrid or to drive up his Old Trafford salary. Ronaldo, who has been on holiday in America recovering from ankle surgery, is back in Lisbon amid claims that he told Portuguese reporters: 'Next week I will return to England and tell them my only desire is to play for Real and I will not negotiate.'

But the player's advisers moved into damage limitation mode and insisted that no such interview had taken place.

United's Player of the Year, who has had an orthodontic check-up in line with current thinking that the health of teeth and gums can affect well-being elsewhere in the body, is due at the Carrington complex in 10 days.

He is unlikely to be greeted with beaming smiles from Ferguson unless he rules out the idea of decamping to the Bernabeu a year into his lucrative five-year contract.

The Old Trafford boss is more likely to switch on the hairdryer to 'welcome' him back and stand firm alongside United chief executive David Gill, who has also adopted a hard-line stance on the subject.

Sir Alex met Ronaldo last month for a private chat and revealed it had been a productive meeting — any change from the 23-year-old now is likely to be given short shrift.

Ronaldo, who scored 42 goals for the champions last season, has agitated for a move all summer after declaring that he had made up his mind to quit Old Trafford even before the Champi-

ons League Final victory.

United's refusal to contemplate recognising his efforts with any financial reward has been a slap in the ego for Ronaldo, whose camp still hope a compromise would keep him happy at United for another year.

But Real are well aware of Ronaldo's intent and have not yet given up the chase for their £70million prize.

Club president Ramon Calderon said: 'Madrid are just spectators in this soap opera. At the moment Manchester United and the player are in a contractual argument and Madrid are waiting. We can do no more for the time being.' It is even possible that the Ronaldo affair could backfire on Real with Calderon forced to play down talk of a management crisis after coach Bernd Schuster lashed out over their summer transfer market activity. Schuster claimed he had been kept in the dark over Real's pursuit of both Ronaldo and Hamburg's Rafael van der Vaart. Calderon insisted: 'I do not want to talk about statements I have not seen but the coach knows he is the first to be informed.'

Told that Schuster appeared angry in his media conference, Calderon replied: 'I do not know his words, but I am convinced that these were made in an ironic tone or misunderstood. The atmosphere is wonderful.'

United had a scare when Wayne Rooney pulled out of training on Thursday morning, suffering from a stomach upset. Club doctors, however, insisted it was not serious although his participation in Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's testimonial against Espanyol on Saturday may now be in doubt.

Real, meanwhile, are more than just spectators as far as Chelsea are concerned and the London club are weighing up two Brazilian alternatives to Robinho should the playmaker stay at the Bernabeu. Werder Bremen's

attacking midfielder Diego and Sao Paulo's highly-rated Hernanes are on Chelsea's list.

Robinho remains their top target but with Real's hopes of landing Ronaldo receding, their chances of signing the player are diminishing.

There is a growing belief in Spain that Robinho, 24, will sign a five-year deal at the Bernabeu after talks with sporting director Predrag Mijatovic in London this weekend.

Real are in the capital for the Emirates Cup.

That could prompt Chelsea to firm up their interest in Diego, who has 38 caps for his country and scored a 90th-minute equaliser against England at Wembley in June.

Attacking midfielder Hernanes is another option after Barcelona balked at Sao Paulo's demand for £20m earlier this summer. However, with just one cap for Brazil, the 23-year-old would struggle to obtain a work permit and may have to be loaned out to a European club first.

Chelsea's Brazilian manager Luiz Felipe Scolari also claimed - despite earlier admissions from Peter Kenyon that owner Roman Abramovich is keen for a more exciting brand of football - that he is under no pressure to win trophies with style.

He added: 'I am not contracted to play pretty but for Chelsea to win championships, then great. This is the philosophy the owner wants. There wasn't a situation that Roman said to me, "We have to play beautiful". He said, "Do better for Chelsea". That's it.' One player who looks to be staying at Chelsea is £30m Andriy Shevchenko. Ruling out a return to AC Milan for the 31-year-old Ukrainian striker, the Italians' coach Carlo Ancelotti said: 'Shevchenko will play at Chelsea this season.'