

Kerimov's Football Team Nears Record Signing

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Billionaire Suleiman Kerimov's Dagestani football team is close to a deal to acquire Cameroonian striker Samuel Eto'o in a transfer that would make the footballer the highest-paid in the world.

The club Anzhi Makhachkala is expected to give Eto'o a three-year contract worth 20 million euros (\$29 million) per season, eclipsing the estimated 12 million euros that Cristiano Ronaldo earns at Real Madrid and the 10.5 million euros that Lionel Messi is paid by Barcelona.

"We're very close. We could close today, tomorrow or next week," Anzhi representative German Tkachenko said late Wednesday, according to the ANSA news agency.

Eto'o also met with Anzhi officials in Milan on Wednesday. ❏

Inter Milan is negotiating with Anzhi officials in Milan for a transfer fee between 20 million and 30 million euros for Eto'o, 30.

"When an offer like that comes around, it's difficult to match or refuse," Inter president Massimo Moratti told Gazzetta dello Sport in an interview published Wednesday.

A Dagestani native, Kerimov has been pumping money into the team ever since he bought it in January, with some critics comparing the tycoon's spending spree to a "feast in time of plague."

Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, is plagued by near-daily violence from insurgency that has spread across the North Caucasus. ❖Anzhi players live and train at a camp outside Moscow and travel to Makhachkala for home games, flying about 2,000 kilometers 15 times a season. ❖Kerimov's worth was nearly the size of Dagestan's gross regional product in 2008.

In Forbes magazine's latest list of the world's richest people, Kerimov's net worth was estimated at \$7.8 billion, tying him for 118th place with Silvio Berlusconi and family.

Berlusconi, Italy's prime minister, is also president of AC Milan. ❖Anzhi's captain is 38-year-old Roberto Carlos, once a standout left back for Brazil.

Before joining Inter in 2009, Eto'o played five seasons with Barcelona, helping the Catalan club to two Champions League titles.

(AP, MT)

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