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£50m a year

By Jo Willey
and David Pilditch

VICTORIA Beckham's American dream was finally fulfilled yesterday when husband David signed the biggest deal in footballing history.

The former England captain has joined Los Angeles Galaxy in a five-year golden handshake contract worth £128million. Bonuses could boost it to £250million.

It means that when Brand Beckham makes its move Stateside, Victoria will be able to enjoy the high profile she has spent years tirelessly building up there.

The deal, which will soar 31-year-old Beckham to superstar status, ended speculation about his footballing future at Spanish club Real Madrid.

He confounded critics who believed he was a spent force in the sport after the worst year of his career in which he lost the England captaincy and was then dropped from the squad.

Now the ex-Manchester United star - already worth a reputed £90million - is set to become one of the highest earning sports stars of all time.

It will see him earn £25.6million a year - or £492,307 a week - from football alone. He earns £6million a year at Real Madrid.

Delight

The figure is a guaranteed base rate but with deals based on factors such as attendances, TV broadcast deals and sponsorship he could nearly double his income.

Beckham is already Britain's richest player, having signed more than £17million in sponsorship deals with firms including Motorola, Pepsi, adidas and Gillette.

One agent who deals with top-earning US basketball stars said: "The big money stars here are great athletes who then become household names because of their skills but Beckham is already a household name here - even though hardly anyone watches football."

"He will probably become a real part of the Hollywood crowd - he's already great friends with Tom Cruise - and that, along with the fact that people will be able to see him play, should make him even more popular."

After announcing the massive deal, a delighted Beckham said: "I am proud to have played for two of the biggest clubs in football and I look forward to the new challenge of growing the world's most popular game in a country that is as passionate about its sport as my own."

The move will also protect the future of Brand Beckham, which has seen its market influence wavering recently.

Last night close friends said Victoria, 32, was "ecstatic".

The ex-Spice Girl found it difficult to settle after Beckham signed for Real Madrid from Manchester United for £25million in 2003.

THE DEAL IN NUMBERS

&128m

The basic rate of the five-year contract. This will earn Becks nearly £500,000 a week - more than £70,000 a day.

&250m

What Beckham could earn if success on the pitch triggers bonuses linked to victories and crowd figures.

&17m

His yearly earnings through advertising deals with firms like Gillette and adidas. This figure is set to soar.

&1bn

The sky's the limit for Goldenballs if he manages to crack Hollywood.



GALAXY-BOUND: David Beckham announcing his switch to Los Angeles yesterday

WORLD'S BEST PAID SPORTS STARS

£45million: Golfer Tiger Woods is expected to give David a run for his money, largely because of his fabulous sponsorship deal from Nike.

£31million: Formula One driver Michael Schumacher earned his cash while driving for Ferrari but he has now retired.

£20million: Boxing legend Oscar De La Hoya has generated half a billion dollars in

TV pay-per-view sales alone in his career.

£17million: Basketball great Michael Jordan is one of the most marketed sportsmen in history and continues to earn huge sums despite now being retired.

£14million: Seven-times Tour De France winner Lance Armstrong also continues to earn substantial sums through endorsements after retiring in 2005.

She has already been seen house hunting in LA and her new career as a fashion designer is largely based in the US.

Now she will be looking harder for a new home for herself, David and their sons Brooklyn, seven, Romeo, four and 23-month-old Cruz.

A source close to the couple said: "To use football parlance it is fair to say both David and Victoria are over the moon."

"They both love America. They have spent a lot of time there and have many friends in LA. This is a dream come true."

Beckham will leave Madrid in June when his contract ends and will kick off his Major League Soccer career two months later. His pay deal also includes commercial endorsements to help promote football in the US.

Yesterday the footballer, who was born in Leytonstone, East

London, insisted he was not making the move for money. He said it had been a "huge decision", adding: "I don't want to go out to America when I'm 34 with people saying, 'Well, he's only going there to get the money.'"

"It's not what I'm going out there to do. I'm going out there to build a club and a team that has got a lot of potential and that's what excites me."

Galactico

Marketing experts said the move to America, instead of sealing out his career at a European club, was a shrewd move.

Stuart Whitwell, joint managing director of brand consultants Intangible Business, said Beckham had recognised that as a player his star was on the wane. "He has got other things

that other sportsmen don't have. I think it is a wise decision. Why be marginalised in Europe when you can be the main draw over there?"

The announcement follows weeks of speculation over the midfielder's future.

Since he joined Real Madrid - as a so-called Galactico with other stars like Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldo - he has failed to win any silverware.

And this season he has been a bit-part player after apparently falling out of favour with new manager Fabio Capello.

The move will also give him the chance to once again pull on his famous No 7 shirt.

On joining Madrid he gave it up as it was being worn by another star, Luis Figo. Instead he opted for the No 23, a nod to his sporting hero Michael Jordan.

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YOUR SUDOKU PUZZLE IS ON PAGE 4 TODAY

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American dream

Pictures: GRAHAM WHITBY-BOOT & MIKE CARRILLO



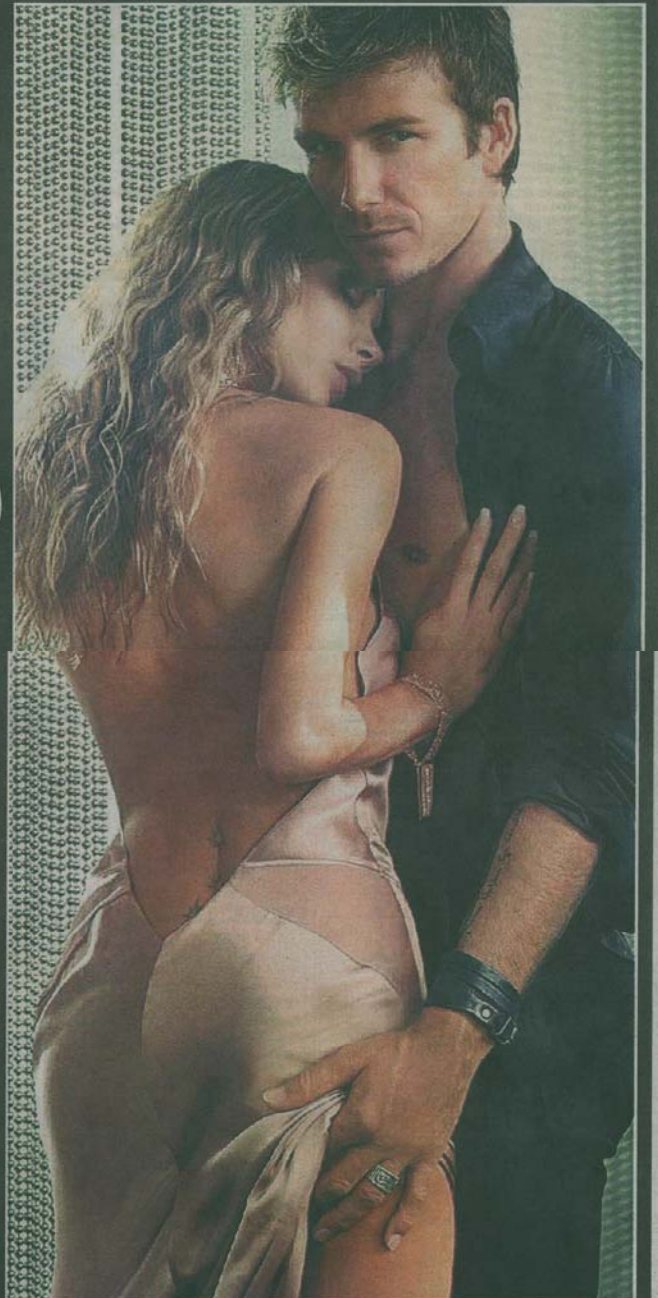
FAN CLUB: Youngsters at David's academy in California



HUMBLE HOME: The Galaxy stadium is a far cry from Real Madrid's ground



TARGETED: One of the luxury US properties viewed by wife Victoria recently



GLAMOUR MODELS: The image that David and Victoria hope will crack Tinseltown

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