

Football financier Harris spearheads £200m bid for Crystal Palace stake

The football financier Keith Harris is spearheading a bid to buy a 45% stake in the Premier League football club Crystal Palace in a deal that could be worth close to £200m.

Sky News has learnt that Mr Harris is advising a group of businessmen including Zechariah Janjua and Navshir Jaffer on an offer to acquire the shareholding from Eagle Football, a vehicle created by American businessman John Textor and owner of a number of major clubs around the world.

Sources said on Thursday that the consortium advised by Mr Harris was a leading contender to buy the stake in the Eagles, although they cautioned that at least one, and possibly two, other parties were also in discussions with Mr Textor.

Mr Harris's group, which would probably execute its deal through a recently established corporate vehicle called Sportbank, may also require financing from other investors as part of its plans, the sources added.

Eagle Football is said to be hopeful that a deal to offload its Crystal Palace shareholding would value the club, which recorded its first win of the Premier League campaign against Tottenham Hotspur last weekend, at more than £400m.

Stanley Tang, one of the founders of the US-based food delivery company DoorDash, is also understood to have expressed an interest in acquiring Eagle Football's stake in Crystal Palace.

A spokesman for Mr Tang denied that he was in discussions to buy Eagle Football's Crystal Palace stake.

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Mr Textor, who declined to comment, is keen to own a controlling interest in a club in English football's top flight, and came close to securing a deal to buy Everton during the summer.

Instead, Everton's long-standing owner agreed a transaction with Dan Friedkin, the owner of Italian Serie A side AS Roma.

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Eagle Football's other footballing interests include Olympique Lyonnais in France, Botafogo, which currently leads Brazil's top division, and RWD Molenbeek in Belgium.

This week, the holding company issued a statement confirming that it is preparing to file confidentially with US regulators ahead of a public listing in the first quarter of next year.

Sky News revealed in August that Eagle Football had lined up Stifel and TD Cowen, the investment banks, to work on the initial public offering (IPO).

The stake in Crystal Palace is being sold by The Raine Group, which has been involved in recent deals involving Chelsea and Manchester United.

In its statement this week, Eagle Football said it would seek \$100m from the sale of shares in the company ahead of an IPO, as well as a further \$500m as part of the flotation itself.

It also wants to raise "up to \$500m to retire existing senior debt, to be achieved through the sale of its interest in Crystal Palace Football Club and, possibly, the placement of long-term senior notes".

Collectively, these moves are expected to help Mr Textor achieve an enterprise value for Eagle Football of around \$2.3bn (£1.74bn), they said.

In the past, Mr Textor has spoken about his belief that public ownership of football teams provides fans with greater transparency about the running of their clubs.

He has described this as the democratisation of ownership – an issue set to face greater scrutiny now that a bill on football regulation has been reintroduced to parliament by the new Labour government.

Some clubs with listed shares, including Manchester United, have, however, endured a torrid relationship with supporters,

partly as a result of their voting rights being controlled by a single dominant shareholder.

Mr Harris declined to comment on Thursday.