

Beckhams are bent on stardom

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CARSON, Calif. — When soccer star David Beckham starts earning his \$250 million keep with the Los Angeles Galaxy this summer, there won't be much glamour to it.

Beckham, 31, will kiss his wife, Victoria, 32, and kids goodbye and battle traffic on the 405 Freeway South to this inland empire of subdivisions and fast-food joints.

He'll park his Aston Martin alongside the Toyotas and Fords at the Home Depot Center, whose 27,000-seat soccer stadium is adjacent to California State University-Dominguez Hills.

After practice, teammate Tyrone Marshall hopes to lure Beckham to In-N-Out Burger, "to get to know the guys."

Nice thought, buddy. But the tattooed heartthrob will likely be rocketing home to his glam wife and new life among the brightest of L.A.'s stars. And Hollywood can't wait.

"They'll fit in so seamlessly that it's almost as if they were born to be here," says celebrity blogger Perez Hilton. "I think they're more high-profile than their famous friends, Tom (Cruise) and Katie (Holmes)."

Prior to the choke-on-your-crumpets contract that lured the couple here, his limited name recognition in the USA came from inspiring the indie hit *Bend It Like Beckham*, while her expired claim to fame was being a Spice Girl.

But precisely because Becks and Posh — as they're known in the British tabloids — aren't familiar names, "everyone's talking about them," says Bryan Alexander, *People* magazine's deputy Los Angeles bureau chief.

"Although they have a lot of celeb cred, some people do wonder what they're all about. Once David starts playing, that will explain him," he says. "As for Posh, she's into her kids, but she's already shown that she'll be at all the glamorous stores and restaurants. She'll definitely, ah, spend it like Beckham."

Sports icon, fashion plate

The British couple do pack a potent pop-culture punch.

He's a global sports icon whose sculpted cheeks shill for Gillette. She's a fashion plate known for her size 0 frame and outre tastes, as in the Tinker Bell outfit she wore to Cruise's November wedding.

In anticipation of their stateside arrival, Madam Tussauds wax figures of the couple were flown in from London to New York last

week, where fans were encouraged to hug and kiss their glossy likenesses. And Beckham is posing as *Sleeping Beauty's* Prince Phillip in a new Disney ad campaign photographed by Annie Leibovitz.

Although the pair are devoted parents to their three children (Brooklyn, 7, Romeo, 4, and Cruz, almost 2), they won't play Ozzie and Harriet in L.A. The family likely will settle in star-studded Beverly Hills or Holmby Hills, where Victoria was spotted a few weeks ago "looking at homes in the \$20 million range," says Kurt Rappaport of Westside Estate Agency. "L.A. loves winners, and they'll be living right near the best of them."

Add the connection to TomKat — whose posse includes Jennifer Lopez and Marc Anthony, Jim Carrey and the Will Smiths — and you have the makings of a duo so in demand you have to wonder how Beckham will find time to practice.

"I've told Tom that he's got to bring David in as soon as he gets here," says Wolfgang Puck, referring to Spago, his star-gasbord eatery in Beverly Hills.

Puck plans to return the favor and attend Galaxy games, even if they aren't exactly close by. "I can't wait to bring my son," he says.

Who knows, soccer dads Cruise and Steven Spielberg might show up pitch-side. "He's a massive star," says fellow Brit Hugh Grant. "He's gone off his game in the past year a bit, but only slightly."

But other celebs will need wooing. Drew Barrymore's reaction when asked about Beckham joining the Galaxy: "I didn't know there was a soccer team in Los Angeles."

The Galaxy are mum on who from Hollywood has been in touch, except to boast that phones "have been ringing off the hook," says general manager Alexi Lalas.

Though he won't release numbers, Lalas doesn't dispute reports that as many as 5,000 season tickets have sold since the announcement, trumpeted with national ads blaring "Summer 2007: Beckham Comes to America."

Far from being thrown by the hype, Lalas predicts Beckham will thrive. "L.A. may be the best place for his type of being to assimilate. After all, his family has long been used to all the publicity," he says. "Meanwhile, his impact on our brand already is just incalculable."

In exchange, Beckham will not only rake in the loot, but also benefit from an unprecedented visibility that could launch a new career.

"Athletes have a limited playing life, so they have to repurpose themselves," says Peter Sealey, former marketing chief at Columbia Pictures and incoming adjunct professor at Claremont Graduate University. "In the old days, they went into politics, like Bill Bradley, or business, like Jack Nicklaus. In our new world, they'll be put into package deals for film and TV."

Beckham and his wife recently signed on with Hollywood powerhouse Creative Artists Agency (which also reps Cruise), hinting that future appearances on some-size screen could be in the cards. "So what if maybe they can't act?" Sealey says. "Neither can our governor (Arnold Schwarzenegger), and it didn't stop him."

Best-actress Oscar nominee Helen Mirren, a Beckham admirer ("He's possibly one of the most beautiful men in the world"), has a suggestion: "If he had a role where he didn't have a big, long speech, maybe a silent role, I think he'd be wonderful in that."

Beckham's camp demurs.

"David's focus in the United States is the Galaxy and his role as soccer ambassador," says his spokesman, Simon Oliveira of London's 19 Entertainment, which also represents Victoria. "He has no plans to look outside of football in terms of his career."

How will Posh spice up life?

As for Posh, her plans remain unclear. Ten years ago, she was at the height of her girl-group fame. But by virtue of both her extravagant lifestyle and her high-profile marriage, she has kept the European media in a state of thrall.

Although *People's* Alexander says Posh could pump up her name here with "the right mix of projects," he doubts she'll go into acting. And she hasn't made any moves in the recording studio in years.

One option could be a reality show. 19 Entertainment is headed by Simon Fuller, the impresario who both managed the Spice Girls and created *American Idol*. Last summer, Fuller announced that he was developing a fashion-themed reality show for Posh, though the project hasn't taken flight.

Overseas, Posh's name is attached to perfume, jeans and sunglasses, so the fashion route could be open to her here — so long as her name recognition is high enough. There's already indication that shouldn't be an issue.

"When I spotted Tom drop off Katie and Posh at The Ivy (restaurant) the other week, I thought an explosion had gone off. There were that many photographers flashing away," says Kathleen Flaherty, owner of public relations firm k21 Communications. "Posh in particular will be hounded in this city. But I think she'll love it here."

Posh said as much in a recent blog posting on her website, gushing about her public reception ("People have been calling out things like, 'Welcome home, we're so excited you're here'").

During that L.A. trip, Posh was equally communicative with the paparazzi, "having her person call us ahead of time to let us know where she'd be and when," says Brandy Navarre of X17online.com, website arm of X17 photo agency.

Navarre is in talks with a team of five shooters who have proposed covering the couple full time. She says British tabloids already are clamoring for images, particularly given Posh's fashion tastes.

"She has a daring, sexy, fitted look that highlights how thin she is," says Michelle Lee, executive editor of *In Touch Weekly*. "She

definitely pushes the envelope. That's something that could have a trickle-down effect on other stars, who have tended toward the conservative at recent awards shows. It'll be interesting to watch."

As it will be to see if the Beckhams hit one of the celeb community's more controversial clubs. "The buzz in town is deafening, and it's all about whether Tom and Katie have gotten David and Posh into Scientology," says blogger Hilton. "It almost seems like a rule. If you want to be friends with Tom, you have to be a Scientologist."

'No one I know talks about him'

Getting interested in Scientology certainly wouldn't hurt in the star-connections department. But in the end, to really shake up this country, Beckham will have to impress guys like David Damico, a salesman at a Santa Monica cosmetics shop.

"The only thing I'm interested in is why you'd pay anyone \$250 million to play soccer," Damico says. "Other than girls saying he's hot, no one I know talks about him."

Beckham can change that with his feet and his smile, while Posh can help generate heat by buddying up to L.A.'s most beloved celebs, steering clear of the ones who get photographed without underwear.

In a very real sense, both Beckhams will have to start from scratch, building up their image like other Brits before them, including *Idol*'s Simon Cowell (the man millions love to hate) and Ozzy Osbourne (the metal hero whose MTV show cemented his fame).

"If you're coming from overseas, you must make it here on U.S. terms, it's as simple as that," says Chris Ayres, Los Angeles correspondent for *The Times* of London. "It reminds me of the time Robbie Williams (the biggest English pop star you've never heard of) came to L.A. determined to break in. He released an album, and no one gave it a second thought."

Ayres says if the Beckhams don't form that special bond here, they could "face the embarrassment of waiting in line at some local club behind Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and the latest reject from *Idol*."

Only time will tell. In the meantime, there are mansions to shop for, private schools to tour, and freeway traffic patterns to sort out.

Welcome to L.A., mates. It's showtime.