

Houllier keeps faith

Football

AFP, London

Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier insisted Monday that his expensive Senegal duo of midfielder Salif Diao and striker El-Hadji Diouf would start to prove their worth from this point in the season onwards.

Houllier spent some 15 million pounds (24.1 million dollars) before this season to bring the pair into the Premiership from French club football after they starred for surprise quarter-finalists Senegal at the World Cup.

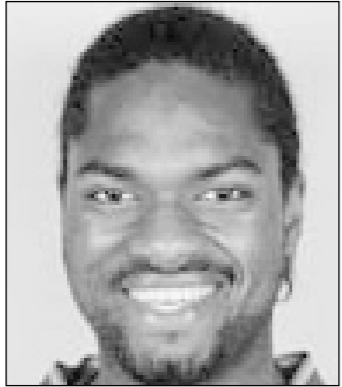
But neither man has yet to set the Premiership on fire and Houllier's wisdom in bringing them to Anfield has been questioned by the Frenchman's critics as early season pacesetters Liverpool have endured a spell of 10 league games without a win.

However, Houllier pointed to the example of Middlesbrough's 8.1 million pounds striker Massimo Maccarone as an example of how foreign players' fortunes can change in the Premiership.

"The Senegal players have taken a lot of stick, probably as much as me," said Houllier. "But I have yet to see a player who comes into the Premiership and delivers

immediately. "Maccarone was shining at the beginning of the season and now he is struggling a bit. It is like that."

"Diouf and Diao, don't forget, went to the quarter-finals of the World Cup.



SALIF DIAO

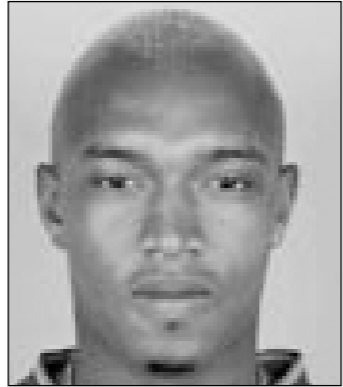
"Sometimes in a situation like that you don't see the best of players until the New Year.

"It will take time. Diouf is 21 while Diao is 24, so they are both young and new to England.

"I have told all my young players, 'Never mind the results'. I just want them to play together because I know they have the talent to come through."

Diouf could make his third successive start on Wednesday in the English League Cup first leg semi-final against First Division Sheffield United.

Liverpool's England forward Michael Owen is still troubled with a



EL-HADJI DIOUF

hamstring injury and his absence has given Diouf a chance to impress the Merseyside club's demanding fans.

Liverpool, despite their poor run in the league, are still involved in three cup competitions - the FA Cup, the League Cup and the UEFA Cup.

Diouf could be teamed up front with Emile Heskey in Wednesday's match at Bramall Lane.

FA Cup draw Farnborough's test of a lifetime

Football

AFP, London

Non-league Farnborough Town were drawn at home to holders Arsenal on Monday in the fourth round of this season's English FA Cup.

Farnborough, who play in the Conference, the league below the Third Division, must now prepare themselves to face the Premiership leaders' star-studded side.

Delighted Farnborough manager Graham Westley, whose team can now expect a cash bonanza from the tie, told Sky Sports he was looking forward to taking on Arsene Wenger's reigning Premiership champions.

"Arsene must have had us in mind because he rested (Thierry) Henry at the weekend," Westley joked.

The other notable tie of the round saw Third Division Shrewsbury, who knocked Premiership high-flyers Everton out of the Cup at the weekend, drawn at home to another top-flight side in Chelsea.

"It's the draw we hoped for," Shrewsbury striker Nigel Jemson,

who scored both goals in the 2-1 win against Everton, said.

There were also several all-Premiership clashes. Blackburn will face either Bolton or Sunderland, Fulham take on London rivals Charlton and Manchester United are at home to relegation-threatened West Ham.

4TH RD DRAW

Norwich or Brighton v Plymouth or Dagenham and Redbridge
Southampton v Cambridge or Millwall

Walsall or Reading v Wimbledon
Blackburn v Bolton or Sunderland
Rochdale v Cardiff or Coventry
Fulham v Charlton

Sheffield United v Ipswich
Shrewsbury v Chelsea
Stoke City v Bournemouth or Crewe

Brentford v Grimsby or Burnley
Farnborough v Arsenal
Manchester United v West Ham
Gillingham or Sheffield Wednesday v Leeds
Wolves v Leicester
Watford v West Brom
Crystal Palace v Liverpool

*Ties to be played on the weekend of Jan 25-26

Hammers getting Bowyer

Football

AFP, London

Leeds United have agreed a transfer fee for the sale of their England midfielder Lee Bowyer to Premiership rivals West Ham, Leeds announced on Monday.

A club statement said Bowyer would be having talks with bottom-of-the-table West Ham later Monday.

Bowyer, 26, has turned down the offer of a new contract at Elland Road. That meant Leeds risked getting nothing for him if he left at the end of the season on a free transfer.

"In the light of these circumstances we have agreed to transfer Lee Bowyer to West Ham United for an undisclosed fee," Leeds said.

Bowyer has had an unsettled time at Leeds since a drawn out court case in 2001 relating to an attack on a student in Leeds in January 2000.

He was eventually cleared of all charges in December 2001

although United team-mate Jonathan Woodgate received a sentence of 100 hours community service.

Bowyer was on the brink of



LEE BOWYER

joining Liverpool before the start of the current season after the clubs agreed a fee.

But the move fell through when Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier

publicly cast doubt on Bowyer's desire to play for the Anfield side.

And last week Bowyer also turned down a move to Premiership new boys Birmingham.

Bowyer, whose one England cap to date came against Portugal in September, joined Leeds from London side Charlton in 1996 for 2.8 million pounds (4.5 million dollars).

Recent British press reports have said Bowyer wanted a return to the capital. West Ham are based in the East End of London.

Bowyer is due to find out on Wednesday what punishment, if any, he will receive from European football's governing body UEFA after television pictures showed him stamping on the head of Malaga defender Gerardo in a UEFA Cup tie in December.

But any ban would apply just to European matches, not something West Ham have to worry about as they battle to avoid going into the First Division, with Bowyer free to play in the league and FA Cup.

Inzaghi wants to end with Milan

Football

INTERNET, Milan

Filippo Inzaghi has declared his desire to finish his playing days at Milan.

The Italian international is in his second season at San Siro and has bagged 19 goals as Milan chase Serie A and Champions League glory.

After arriving from Juventus in the summer of 2001, Inzaghi's debut campaign for Milan was blighted by injury but he has returned with a vengeance this term.

He admits he is happy with the rossoneri and envisages ending his career with the club before moving into the coaching ranks.

"If possible, I want to stay with Milan for life," affirmed Inzaghi.

"Here, it is like a big family. I have spoken frequently with Mr (Adriano) Galliani and there are the conditions for me to end my career here and then, I would like to train children to teach them about the secrets of this job. We'll see."

Inzaghi also turned his attentions to the race for the Scudetto, with Milan currently topping the table on goal difference from city foes Internazionale.

The prolific marksman is also wary of the threat posed by champions Juventus and surprise title contenders Lazio.

He added: "I know about Juve very well and they have a winning mentality."

"Lazio are the real surprise. They have some champion players and they also showed themselves to be professionals in difficult moments."

Dacourt heading for Rome

Football

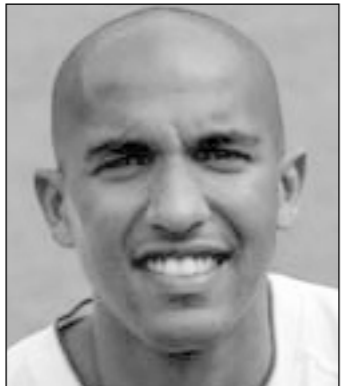
AFP, Rome

French international midfielder Olivier Dacourt looks set to end his unhappy season at resurgent English Premiership outfit Leeds United and join Italian giants AS Roma after the two clubs agreed terms here Monday.

According to Italian television station RAI Leeds chairman Peter Ridsdale agreed the deal - Dacourt will move on loan till the end of the season when Roma will buy him outright for 7million euros (7million dollars) - after talks with Roma supremo Franco Sensi and sporting director Franco Baldini.

The 2001 Italian champions did not confirm the report, though the deal is expected to go through in the

next couple of days which would allow 28-year-old Dacourt make his debut against Chievo on Sunday as



OLIVIER DACOURT

coach Fabio Capello had wished. It would represent something of a coup for Roma over their bitter city

rivals Lazio as Dacourt turned down a 15 million pound transfer to them last summer.

Dacourt played a starring role for Leeds during the David O'Leary regime after he was signed for 7.2 million pounds from Lens in May 2000 but has fallen out with manager Terry Venables this term, telling France Football that Leeds' season was a "disgrace".

While Venables said at the time he would personally drive Dacourt to the airport he has softened his tone since then and offered the Frenchman a chance of first-team football should he merit it.

Leeds, though, would welcome offloading Dacourt even temporarily as the Italians would pay his wages and Venables is under pressure to lighten the wage bill as the club seeks to reduce its 77million pound debt.

Bergkamp's farewell wish

Football

AFP, London

Flying Dutchman Dennis Bergkamp aims to bring down the curtain on his Arsenal career with a European Champions League victory in May.

The 33-year-old scored his 100th goal in seven years for Arsenal in the 2-0 FA Cup win over third division Oxford on Saturday.

And for a man who refuses to fly, this year's European Champions League final could not be held at a better place, with the showcase match being played at Manchester United's Old Trafford ground.

"We do have a chance in the Champions League," he said Monday. "When you look at the whole squad, there aren't many better squads around."

"So if we can all get together and get something going even

better than so far, we do have a chance. That would be great for me."

"It would be a perfect finale for me."

However, he did not rule out another year in London.

"If I had to make a decision now then, yes, I would carry on, but there's still a long way to go in the season," he said.

"I think I would regret stopping, but I don't want to make a final decision yet."

Arsenal, who top their group, reopen Champions' league hostilities with a clash with one of Bergkamp's old clubs, Ajax Amsterdam, with whom he won the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1987, on February 18.

"I think I speak for everyone connected with the club when I say that the European Cup is the one we're really keen on," he added.

Romario picking final club

Football

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Brazilian striker Romario, who will be 37 this month, said on Monday that his next club will be his last as speculation mounted over where he would continue his career.

Romario is expected to choose between staying at Fluminense, where he ended a six-month contract last month, or moving back to for a third stint at his local rivals Flamengo - who sacked him just over three years ago, saying he spent a night on the town without permission.

"The home which shelters me now will be my last," Romario told reporters as he left a restaurant following lunch with Flamengo directors.

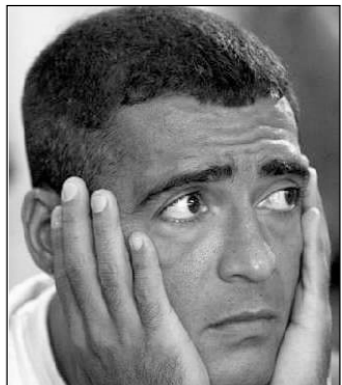
"My wish is to wake up, train and play at a club where I'm wanted."

Romario was due to meet Fluminense officials later the same day.

Romario scored 15 goals for Fluminense as he led them to the semi-finals of the Brazilian champi-

onship last year after moving from Vasco da Gama.

Although other players at Fluminense claimed they were being paid several months late, Romario's wages were paid directly



ROMARIO

by the team sponsors.

Romario is still regarded as one of Brazil's most prolific penalty area specialists and his exclusion from the World Cup squad last year

caused a national outcry, which died down as Brazil progressed through the tournament to win a record fifth title.

His career has also taken him to Barcelona and Valencia in Spain and PSV Eindhoven in the Netherlands.

Romario's last spell with Flamengo - Brazil's most popular club - ended in November 1999, when he was fired by the then president Edmundo Santos Silva for leaving the team hotel and spending a night at a discotheque after his team had been knocked out of the Brazilian championship.

The incident happened in the town of Caxias do Sul, the heart of Brazil's wine-producing region, where Romario was photographed with the "Queen of the Grape Festival."

"He went to a nightclub to have a good time while millions of fans were crying at home," said Silva at the time. Silva was fired by the club last year for alleged misuse of funds and replaced by Helio Ferraz.

Bielsa on the road again



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina coach Marcelo Bielsa admitted to a sense of deja vu Friday as he began rebuilding his team for the 2006 World Cup.

The brooding, eccentric coach spent four years forming what many believed to be the best team in the world in the run-up to the 2002 World Cup only to see his work undone in three games as Argentina crashed to a shock first-round exit.

Having surprisingly been kept on for another four-year term, Bielsa said Friday that he is starting from scratch again.

He has called up a squad of only home-based players for next

month's three-match tour to Honduras and the United States to find possible replacements for stalwarts such as Diego Simeone and Gabriel Batistuta, who are unlikely to be around in 2006.

"This cycle is very similar to the previous one," said Bielsa, who took a similarly experimental team to the 1999 Copa America in Paraguay.

"We need a project like the one

a cycle of four years."

Argentina, who beat Japan 2-0 in their only match since their debacle in the Korea/Japan World Cup finals, face Honduras in Tegucigalpa on February 1, then travel to the United States to take on Mexico and the U.S. team.

They also played the Netherlands away on February 12, when Bielsa is likely to bring back the "foreigners."

Bielsa refused to shut the door on Boca Juniors striker Marcelo Delgado, who was picked for the tour but has failed to turn up for the training camp which began outside Buenos Aires Thursday.

Delgado told local media that he was in the middle of negotiations over a possible transfer to Japan and his mind was on his club career.

"Delgado's attitude does not annoy me or bother me," Bielsa said. "It's a personal decision to be understood and respected."

"Boca Juniors gave us the information via their directors and told me that Delgado would not be present."

"In spite of his negative response, I would call him up again if it is in the interests of the team."



MARCELO BIELSA

we are going to develop so that, from this group, we can produce players who will supply the change of parts which is indispensable after

McBride cleared for Everton

Football

REUTERS, Liverpool

United States striker Brian McBride has completed his loan move to English premier league side Everton after receiving his work permit.

The 30-year-old Columbus Crew

Goodison Park, Everton's official Web Site reported on Tuesday.

McBride follows in the footsteps of international team mate Joe-Max Moore, who spent three years at Everton before leaving in December.

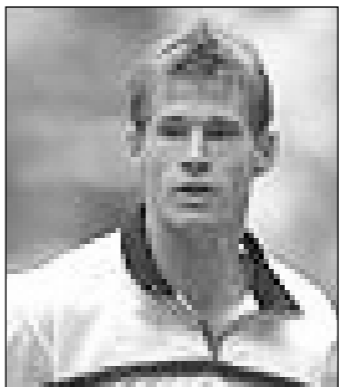
"It's three months," McBride said. "I really have no expectations, I'm just here to try and help out in any way I can."

"I'm sure it will be a different type of football to what I've been used to in the past. I've had a chance to watch a lot of it. It's a fast-paced game and the quality is very high. It's going to be a lot of fun."

McBride, capped 64 times by the United States, is already familiar with the English game. In the 2000/01 season he scored once in 11 appearances for English first division club Preston North End, whose manager at the time was David Moyes, now the Everton chief.

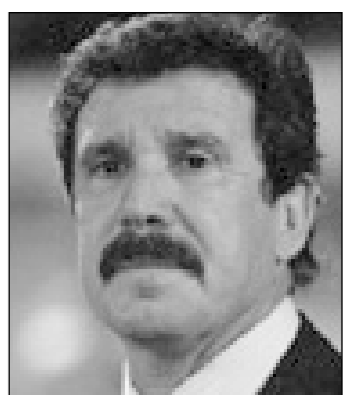
The American will compete for a place in the Everton attack with Kevin Campbell, Canadian Tomasz Radzinski and 17-year-old Wayne Rooney.

"I am looking forward to playing alongside Wayne Rooney. He's got a great first touch and he's a very exciting player," McBride added. "I can bring depth to Everton, I can help us attack and defend, but also provide an outlet for the team and get myself in the box."



BRIAN MCBRIDE

striker, an important member of the U.S. team who reached the World Cup quarter-finals last year, has signed a three-month deal at



Coelho new ROK coach?

REUTERS, Seoul

Former Portugal coach Humberto Coelho is to take charge of South Korea.

The Korea Football Association said it hoped Coelho would sign a contract by the end of January after it chose him ahead of rival candidate Bruno Metsu, who led Senegal to the World Cup quarter-finals last year.

South Korea, the tournament co-hosts with Japan, reached the last four of the World Cup under Guus Hiddink before he opted to return to his native Netherlands to head club PSV Eindhoven.

Coelho's first match in charge is due to be a friendly against Colombia, in Korea on March 29.

Bid to host FIFA WC 2010 Nigeria going with others

Football

REUTERS, Lagos

Nigeria, one of six African countries to officially register an interest in staging the 2010 World Cup finals, said on Monday they were heading up a joint-bid involving four of their West African neighbours.

Earlier on Monday FIFA announced that Nigeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia had all submitted their initial bids by the December 31 deadline.

Later on Monday Segun Odegbami, the head of the Nigerian bid, said that Nigeria was joining four other nations in their effort to stage the first African finals.

"Cameroun, Ghana, Benin Republic and Togo are our West African neighbours and we have got them involved in this grand-scale plan," Odegbami told Reuters.

"We have spoken to their football ambassadors and we are getting their governments to back it. The Nigerian government is supporting this."

In response, FIFA spokesman Andreas Herren told Reuters: "From FIFA's perspective, six associations have registered their initial interest by the deadline."

"The Nigerian letter expressing their interest does not mention any other countries, but the bidding process is, clearly, at a very early stage and we shall deal with any changes to the Nigerian bid as and

when we are officially informed." The only other bid for a major football competition as geographically adventurous as the mooted West African bid was a failure.

Last month a four-nation Scandinavian bid from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland to host the 2008 European Championships was rejected by UEFA, who awarded the tournament to a smaller joint bid from Austria and Switzerland.

Last year's World Cup in South Korea and Japan was the first as a shared event.

But the Nigerian bid leader was optimistic about his plan.

Odegbami added: "Nigeria is the fulcrum on which this bid is rotating, the other four are ancillary. The idea has, however, sparked a great interest among the countries who say it's too good to be true -- they will be having at least a World Cup game."

"Our plan is to have four of the venues in Nigeria and the rest spread across our four ECOWAS neighbours."

ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) was launched in 1975 to weld together the 16 countries in the region and promote regional commerce and trade.

Officials say plans are at an advanced stage to launch a common ECOWAS currency and airline next year.

Odegbami said: "These will be part of the facilities for our bid and help spread the responsibility of hosting such a big event."

The bid committee would be inaugurated in the Nigerian capital Abuja this week, he said, adding: "Then, we will start the serious work of bringing out something more concrete by April."

Bidders have until April 30 to formally confirm or withdraw their declaration of interest, while bids are to be presented to FIFA in August.

Last September, FIFA's Executive Committee confirmed the 2010 finals would be held in Africa to start the principle of the World Cup rotating around the continents.

South Africa failed by one vote to win the right to stage the 2006 World Cup, which went to Germany while Morocco are now bidding for the fourth time.

FIFA is expected to name which country will stage the finals in May 2004.

Juve stunned at UAE

AFP, Al-Ain, UAE

Italian giants Juventus crashed to a 1-0 defeat at the hands of Al-Ain of the United Arab Emirates here on Sunday in a friendly match.

Mohamed Omar scored the only goal of the game after seven minutes for the home side who were champions of their national league last season.

On Friday, Juventus defeated a World XI in Abu Dhabi 4-2 in a match played to mark the retirement of UAE international striker Adnan Taliati.

Lualua echoes Shearer

Football

AFP, Newcastle

The recriminations over Newcastle United players attitudes during Sunday's 3-2 FA Cup third round defeat by Wolves continued Monday as striker Lomana Lualua joined their captain Alan Shearer in criticising the lack of desire.

The 22-year-old Democratic Republic of Congo international striker accused certain players of strolling through the match which Newcastle trailed 2-0 before coming back to 2-2 with Wolves getting a deserved third to take the tie.

Lualua almost pulled the sides level again after coming on as a substitute, which upset him even more given what he saw from several players on the pitch, but his shot was cleared off the line.

"The manager (Bobby Robson) has to pick his team and it was fair enough that I was only a substitute," he told the Newcastle Chronicle.

"But I feel really hurt when I had to sit and watch certain players walking around the pitch instead of

working hard for the team.

"I also feel hurt for our supporters having to watch certain players not even playing but just walking around," added Lualua, who has hit the back of the net just five times in 27 Premiership appearances since joining from Colchester United in September 2000.

Lualua's comments echoed those of Shearer, who has yet to win anything with Newcastle and with just one Premiership winners title to his name - with Blackburn in 1995 - at 32 he knows his time is running out.

"We deserved to lose," said an angry Shearer, who hit his 16th goal of the season from the penalty spot to make it 2-2.

"There weren't enough players working hard enough."

Lualua also said he was getting frustrated at not winning anything and wondered when that would change.

"I want to play for Newcastle and win things with them. But we are out of the League Cup and now out of the FA Cup, so what are we going to win now?"