

Premiership preview

# Houllier under pressure

Football

AFP, London

Gerard Houllier would be forgiven for thinking Saturday's Merseyside derby was even more important than usual.

Liverpool manager Houllier has seen his side score just one goal this season from three games.

The Reds are languishing in 15th place with just two points so far and although it is still early in the season many pundits have written off their title chances.

A goalless midweek draw at home to Tottenham did little to inspire confidence but ahead of Saturday's trip across Stanley Park to city rivals Everton's Goodison Park ground, Houllier was doing his best to maintain an even keel.

"The derby will be a different story," the Frenchman insisted. "I am delighted with the attitude and character my team are showing. The win will come as well the goals."

Everton have made a steady start with four points from their first three games but star striker Wayne Rooney was on target in the midweek draw against Charlton.

But Toffees manager David Moyes said 17-year-old Rooney was not yet firing on all cylinders. "I can only tell you when I think Wayne's right and when he's not."

"He's getting fitter but he's not quite getting past people the way he can."

Leaders Arsenal are away to Manchester City on Sunday while defending champions Manchester United, who also have a 100 percent record but are currently second on goal difference, travel to Southampton.

And Arsenal striker Thierry Henry said the team were prepared to win 'ugly' if it meant taking the title back to Highbury.

"Some people say we let in too many last season and lost too many leads to win the championship. Maybe that is right and we are working on it," the France forward added.

"But it is not always the quality that matters. You have to have commitment and desire all the time."

"We know that on our day we can fight against any team in the world for quality but sometimes you find it is not your day for playing well and then you have to find a way to win maybe 1-0."

"The manager wants us to defend more positively and I think that so far

it is going well.

"And we can still score perhaps even more if we challenge higher up the field and win the ball back. The quicker you do that the better because the most important thing is getting the ball back after you have lost it."

United travel to the south coast with England midfielder Paul Scholes set to soldier on despite a hernia problem.

"Paul has been carrying a hernia problem for quite a bit," said United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

"It is really painful and at the moment it is not possible for him to play two games in a week."

"He will need an operation at some point but we will have to pick our moment."

United have injury doubts over Rio Ferdinand, Mikael Silvestre, Nicky Butt and Quinton Fortune.

Elsewhere two of the divisional new boys, Wolverhampton and Portsmouth, go head to head at Molineux.

They have had contrasting starts to their Premiership season. Portsmouth - last season's First Division champions - are unbeaten, two wins and a draw leaving them in third place.

Earlier in the week they thrashed Bolton 4-0 at Fratton Park and are in the words of Wolves boss Dave Jones "flying at the moment".

By contrast, Wolves are propping up the table, the Midlands club the only team in the division without a point.

They have conceded 10 goals in their three games but pushed United hard in a 1-0 defeat at Old Trafford last time out.

"Of course, we are not going to get carried away but two wins in the first three games is certainly better than losing two or three," said Portsmouth's ex-England midfielder Steve Stone.

But Wolves would love nothing more than to upset the Pompey bandwagon.

FIXTURES

**Saturday (1400GMT unless stated):** Aston Villa v Leicester, Bolton v Charlton, Chelsea v Blackburn, Everton v Liverpool (1130GMT), Middlesbrough v Leeds, Newcastle v Birmingham, Tottenham v Fulham, Wolverhampton v Portsmouth  
**Sunday:** Manchester City v Arsenal (1505 GMT), Southampton v Manchester United (1300GMT)

# Chelsea getting closer

Football

AFP, London

Chelsea were reported Friday to be poised to complete the signing of Real Madrid's France international midfielder Claude Makelele for 14 million pounds (22 million dollars).

Media reports in Britain and France said that despite Real Madrid's reluctance to talk about the transfer, both Chelsea and the player himself were confident they could complete the deal before Sunday's transfer deadline.

And SKY Sports News reported that the player arrived in London on Friday for a medical at the London club.

Chelsea and Real Madrid officials were believed to have met after the Champions League draw in

Monte Carlo on Thursday.

The 30-year-old Makelele, angry he is the lowest-paid player at Real, has told his Real Madrid teammates he no longer wants to play for the Spanish champions.

He has two years left on his contract and could earn 50,000 pounds a week with Chelsea.

His arrival would take Chelsea's spending to over 100 million pounds (158 million dollars) since Russian oil billionaire Roman Abramovich paid 140 million pounds (233 million dollars) for the London club in July.

They have already paid 96 million pounds (150 million dollars) to bring Hernan Crespo, Adrian Mutu, Juan-Sebastian Veron, Damien Duff, Geremi, Joe Cole, Wayne Bridge, Glen Johnson, Alexei Smertin and Marc Ambrosio to Stamford Bridge.

# Fergie charged with misconduct

Football

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson was charged Thursday by the Football Association (FA) with misconduct after his outburst against officials during last weekend's win against Newcastle.

Ferguson, who was ordered out of the dugout, faced two separate charges. One was a general charge of "improper conduct", the other a more specific claim that Ferguson verbally abused match officials.

The Scot could either be fined or banned from the touchline if found guilty.

He appeared especially enraged when no action was taken against Andy O'Brien for his challenge on Ryan Giggs with some reports suggesting he reacted by calling the



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

officials "cheats".

In a statement on their website, the governing body said:

"The FA have today charged Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson with misconduct for breaches of FA Rule E1 and E2.



Juventus goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon (R) poses with the legendary George Best after receiving the Most Valuable Player award at the UEFA European Football Awards ceremony in Monaco on August 28.

# Buffon Europe's best

Football

UEFA, Monaco

Gianluigi Buffon received the Most Valuable Player award at the UEFA European Football Awards ceremony in Monaco on the eve of the season curtain-raising UEFA Super Cup. The Juventus FC player is the first goalkeeper to receive the top prize at the awards, which reward performances in the previous season's UEFA club competition campaigns.

After accepting the Best Goalkeeper award from former Manchester United FC player George Best, Buffon was later called back on stage to accept the Most Valuable Player from Prince Albert of Monaco.

The Italian international goalkeeper produced a string of superb saves as Juventus reached the UEFA Champions League final and produced an inspirational performance in the showpiece itself, even though Juve were ultimately

edged out on penalties by AC Milan.

As well as Buffon in the goalkeeper section, there were three other main category winners. Real Madrid CF's Roberto Carlos was presented with the Best Defender accolade by Roberta Bettega, Pavel Nedved received the Best Midfielder award from Didier Deschamps, while Manchester United's Ruud van Nistelrooi's scoring exploits saw him presented with the Best Forward award by a former United scoring sensation, Sir Bobby Charlton.

In addition, Milan's Paolo Maldini received the UEFA President's Award from Lennart Johansson in recognition of a long career at the highest level for club and country and loyalty to the club he joined as a boy.

There were several other presentations during the lavish ceremony. Roy Makaay received the ESM Golden Shoe from Eusebio; the UEFA Cup-winning coach, José Mourinho of FC Porto, received a trophy from Vicente Del Bosque; while the winning coach in the

Champions League, Carlo Ancelotti of Milan, received an award from Ruud Gullit.

Meanwhile, the UEFA Chief Executive Gerhard Aigner presented the UEFA Charity Cheque for one million Swiss francs, to the referee of this season's UEFA Champions League final, Markus Merk. The sum is to be donated to the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Dutchman Aron Winter also received a Special Award from UEFA President Lennart Johansson as a tribute not only to his distinguished career in the game but also his stance against racism.

UEFA AWARDS

**Best player and best goalkeeper:** Gianluigi Buffon (ITA/Juventus)  
**Best defender:** Roberto Carlos (BRA/Real Madrid)  
**Best midfielder:** Pavel Nedved (CZE/Juventus)  
**Best striker:** Ruud van Nistelrooy (NED/Manchester United)  
**Best coach:** Carlo Ancelotti (ITA/AC Milan)

# Serie A preview

# Old Lady ready to sing

Football

AFP, Rome

Defending champions Juventus begin the defence of their Italian league title on Sunday at home to Tuscan side Empoli.

Boosted by the signing of midfield dynamo Stephen Appiah, Juve's Alessio Tacchinardi believes Turin's grand 'Old Lady' are hungrier than ever for the championship as they attempt to land their third consecutive Scudetto.

"There are many great players here and the will to win is greater than it was last season," said the 27-year-old midfielder.

"We have brought in new players and the squad is a strong as it has ever been. Appiah is an extraordinary player who is going to be a major success. With him, Edgar Davids and all the others, we have an incredibly strong midfield."

Tacchinardi admitted last season's Champions League final defeat at the hands of Serie A rivals AC Milan had been a bitter blow, but said the squad had learned a lot from their Manchester misery.

"Losing the final gave us a slap round the face, but sometimes that puts you on the right path to success," said the Italy international who played in the 1-0 friendly defeat of Germany last week.

"Juventus's secret is that the squad is full of champions. Men like Antonio Conte and Ciro Ferrara, for example, who are still so motivated at the start of a new season, despite

their extraordinary careers. This attitude spreads throughout the team and we will be treating every Sunday like it was a final."

Inter Milan, who finished second last season, seven points behind Juve, welcome Modena to the San Siro.

Only time will tell if Inter are to regret the sale of Hernan Crespo to big-spending English club Chelsea, but captain Javier Zanetti is confident the team will cope without the Argentine striker.

"Morale is good. I am sorry to see Hernan go because he is not only a great footballer but a good friend too," said Zanetti, who plays together with Crespo in the Argentine national team.

"This is football and the club makes the decisions. It's a great loss but we still have an excellent squad capable of winning the title and going far in the Champions League."

Zanetti predicted Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins would soon make the Inter fans forget about Crespo.

"He may be young but he is a quick learner and made giant strides last season," he said.

"He has the ability to fly past defenders and will be a major asset to us."

"There are still aspects of his game he needs to work on, but I think he is destined for a memorable season."

AC Milan's match away to newly-promoted Ancona takes place on Monday as the Champions League winners are playing in the European Super Cup in Monaco on Friday.

Despite performing poorly in pre-

season with five friendly defeats, Milan captain Paolo Maldini is confident the European champions will fare better in the league than last season's third place.

"Psychologically we are strong after winning the Champions League and Italian Cup and we are determined to win the Scudetto," he said.

"Maybe we saved our best performances for Europe but I'm sure we can bring that into our league matches."

"We need to be more consistent and treat every opponent with the same respect, whether its Juventus or Ancona."

Lazio, who clinched a place in the group stages of the Champions League this week after defeating Benfica in their third round qualifier, host newly-promoted southerners Lecce.

The 2003-04 season gets underway on Saturday with Calabrian club Reggina playing at home to newly-promoted Sampdoria.

FIXTURES

(All matches 1300 GMT unless stated)  
**Saturday:** Reggina v Sampdoria (1600 GMT)  
**Sunday:** Bologna v Parma (1830 GMT), Brescia v Chievo, Inter Milan v Modena, Juventus v Empoli, Lazio v Lecce, Perugia v Siena, Udinese v AS Roma (1830 GMT)  
**Monday:** Ancona v AC Milan (1830 GMT)

# UEFA Cup draw made

Football

BBC, Monaco

Southampton will play Romanian side Steaua Bucharest in the UEFA Cup first round - their first European tie for 19 years.

Gordon Strachan's side will take on the 1986 European Cup winners at St Mary's in the first leg on 24 September, with the return three weeks later.

Liverpool, UEFA Cup winners in 2001, were handed a tie against Slovenian outfit Olimpija Ljubljana, who saw off Shelbourne in the qualifying round.

Newcastle also have hopes of progressing to the latter stages of the competition after missing out on qualification for the Champions League with defeat to Partizan Belgrade in midweek.

Sir Bobby Robson's side will face Dutch side NAC Breda.

Manchester City, who completed a 7-0 aggregate win over Welsh side TNS on Thursday in the qualifying round, were paired with Lokeren of Belgium.

first leg of their tie against Gencleberligi, who finished third in the Turkish league last year.

Hearts meet Bosnian outfit NK Zeljeznica, while Dundee have been paired with Italian Serie A side Perugia.

Perugia hit the headlines this summer when they signed Saadi Gaddafi, the son of the Libyan president Colonel Gaddafi, and also

have former Coventry player Jay Bothroyd in their ranks.

Elsewhere, the seeding system used ensured there were no big names drawn together.

Barcelona will open in Slovakia against Puchov, while Borussia Dortmund - bundled out of the Champions League qualifiers by Club Brugge after a penalty shoot-out - take on Austria Vienna.

# Full first round draw

Dundee v Perugia; Newcastle v NAC Breda; Hearts v Zeljeznica; Gencleberligi v Blackburn; Liverpool v Olimpija Ljubljana; Man City v Lokeren; Southampton v Steaua Bucharest; Aik Stockholm v Valencia; Dinamo Bucharest v Shakhtar; Maccabi Haifa v Publikum; Torpedo Moscow v CSKA Sofia; Cementarnica v Lens; Benfica v La Louviere; Panionios v Nordsjaelland; Udinese v Salzburg; Puchov v Barcelona; Dinamo Zagreb v MTK Hungaria; Hapoel Ramat Gan v Levski Sofia; Kaiserslautern v Teplice; Sarti v Slavia Prague; Villarreal v Trabzonspor; Grasshoppers v Hadjuk Split; Hertha Berlin v Groclin; Valerenga v Grazer AK; Zimbru Chisinau v Aris Salonika; FC Copenhagen v Ferencvaros; Varteks v Debrecen; Hamburg v Dnipro; Bordeaux v Petrzalka; Roma v Vardar; Spartak Moscow v Esbjerg FB; Wisla Krakow v NEC Nijmegen; Leiria v Molde; Austria Vienna v Borussia Dortmund; Auxerre v Xamax; Ventspils v Rosenborg; Gaziantepspor v Hapoel Tel Aviv; Odense v Red Star Belgrade; Sporting Lisbon v Malmö; Utrecht v Zilina; Metalurh v Parma; MyPa v Sochaux; Schalke v Kamen Ingrad; Mallorca v APOEL; Feyenoord v Kamnten; PAOK Salonika v Lyn; Malatyaspor v Basel; Brondby v Viktoria Zizkov  
\* Ties to be played 24 September and 15 October

# Primera Liga preview

# Lights, camera, action!

Football

AFP, Madrid

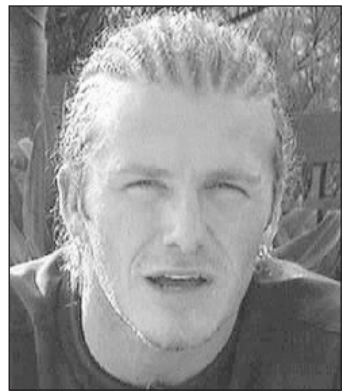
The Spanish league will open for business on Saturday, a wealth of talent on show to make the rest of the continent green with envy, with one or two notable exceptions.

Chelsea may have spent more than 100 million pounds (157 million dollars) on turning themselves into Premiership title material and Manchester United may have the "new" Ronaldo.

But Real Madrid insist they have usurped United as the biggest club in the world - and the crown they wear today is more bejewelled than any seen before at club level in the history of the game.

Prising David Beckham away from Old Trafford means the crown sits heavier than ever upon the club's corporate head and president Florentino Perez, along with Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz - another new arrival from United - will feel obliged to deliver a tenth European Cup as well as retain the league title.

The upside of Beckham's arrival



DAVID BECKHAM

is plain to see. Millions of hysterical fans watched their four-match summer tour of Asia, either in the flesh or on television, and white shirts have been selling worldwide by the thousand, not just those emblazoned with "23 Beckham" on the back.

Almost as many millions have flowed back into the club's stretched coffers in merchandising and television rights in a feeding frenzy which has followed Beckham and com-

pany around since his July signing.

England skipper Beckham, French maestro Zinedine Zidane, the 'original' Ronaldo, (he of the World Cup-winning variety rather than United's young Portuguese hopeful), Luis Figo, Raul Gonzalez, Roberto Carlos, Iker Casillas - the names trip off the tongue and belong in a world XI.

World XIs occasionally materialise in gala games where the result does not matter.

But Real's opening game Saturday at home to rather less regal Real Betis, who have won just five times at the Bernabeu in 70 years, is a must win affair.

Beckham may have got his first Bernabeu appearance - and his first home goal - for Real out of the way in picking up the Super Cup on Wednesday at Mallorca's expense.

But wages of a reported six million euros a season for Beckham have not gone well with everyone, not least French midfielder Claude Makalele, a vital cog in the engine room but who says he will leave unless he receives a big pay rise, complaining he earns some five times less.

Cue a request by Makelele to be freed from a contract which has

excess of it," charges Betis coach Victor Fernandez.

As Real seek domination of Spain, Europe and the world, bitter rivals Barcelona will be out to emerge from a recent slump.

Barca, sixth last time out, have invested in a new coach, Frank Rijkaard, hoping he can galvanise the club as another former Dutchman, Johan Cruyff, did in the early 1990s and as compatriot Louis Van Gaal failed to do in more recent times.

Also on board is Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldinho, who preferred Barca to Manchester United. The Catalan club see him as the ace in their pack as they chase their first title since 1999.

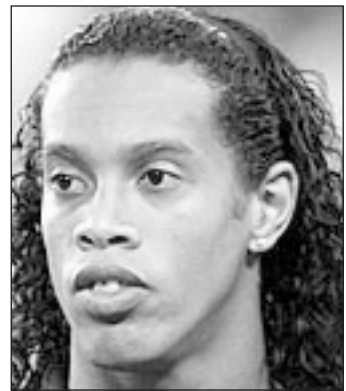
Barca have won the Liga 16 times to 29 for Real.

"I have always dreamed of playing here," said Ronaldinho after securing his long-sought move from Paris Saint Germain and who now has to live up the reputation of samba stars who have gone before him at the Nou Camp such as Ronaldo and Rivaldo.

"I hope to win as many trophies as possible," said the 22-year-old - echoing the words of a certain Englishman in Madrid.

FIXTURES

**Saturday (times GMT):** Real Madrid v Real Betis (1730), Albacete v Osasuna (1900), Athletic Bilbao v Barcelona (to be arranged), Espanyol v Real Sociedad (1845), Malaga v Villarreal (1900), Valencia v Valladolid (1930)  
**Sunday:** Racing Vigo v Murcia (1800), Celta Santander v Real Mallorca (1800), Seville v Atletico Madrid (1930), Real Zaragoza v Deportivo La Coruna (1930)



RONALDINHO

three years to run and a clutch of negative publicity for the Real 'brand.'

Another French star, Zidane, admits this year will be more difficult than ever.

"This year's going to be tough. We're going to be asked to win everything."

Betis have already upped the ante. "It's a blessed problem to have - but Real just have too much talent, the team is unbalanced by an

For Rijkaard, "Ronaldinho can play anywhere. He is a player who will make the difference."

The addition of Turkish international keeper Recber Rustu should also help Barca's cause.

Barca kick off at Athletic Bilbao, always a tough assignment in their own San Mames stronghold.

Last year's runners up Real Sociedad start off away to Espanyol on Saturday while third-placed finishers Deportivo La Coruna travel to Real Zaragoza on Sunday.

# Battle of Britain set

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Monaco

Manchester United got a Battle of Britain clash when they were drawn in the same group as Glasgow Rangers, Greece's Panathinaikos and Germany's Stuttgart in the Champions League draw on Thursday.

The match up between the champions of England and Scotland is a first between the clubs in European Champions League football and is sure to attract huge attention to the games at Ibrox and Old Trafford.

"Yesterday we weren't sure we would be in it. Now we have got Manchester United!" said Rangers chairman John McClelland, the day after his side had scraped their way into the draw with a late goal in Copenhagen in a final qualifier.

"The atmosphere will be electric at both grounds. We want to be in the Champions League. We are and we are delighted about it."

Manchester United's Scottish manager Alex Ferguson said it was a great draw.

"I was half expecting to get a Scottish team, but also not expecting it to happen. But it has."

Chief Executive Peter Kenyon said that the England-Scotland clash was the pick of the draw "Rangers is the big one," he said.

"Experience will count. Our experience is second to none. In the last seven years we have reached the quarter-finals or better. We know Champions League nights at Old Trafford are very special."

Adding spice to the clash will be the fact that Ferguson and Rangers coach McLeish were old associates during Aberdeen's glory years in the 1980s when Ferguson was in charge at Pittodrie and McLeish was a defensive stalwart.

Ferguson was also a striker on Rangers books early in his playing career but eventually fell out of favour and was transferred.

Manchester United's great English rival Arsenal were thrown into a demanding first round group against last season's semi-finalists Inter Milan, Dynamo Kiev and Lokomotiv Moscow.

Arsenal chairman David Dein underlined how far his team will have to travel to make it through saying: "It's great for the air miles."

"We can't be frightened of any team. We are now seeded fifth in the whole of Europe."

Nine-times winners Real Madrid face Portuguese neighbours and UEFA Cup champions Porto, French side Marseille, thrown out for match-fixing after winning the 1993 trophy, and Partizan Belgrade of Serbia-Montenegro. Real's former star striker Emile Butragueño, now deputy sports

director at the club, said the Spaniards would be wary of Partizan as they had knocked out Newcastle United on penalties to reach the group stage.

As for Marseille "it will give Zinedine Zidane the chance to go back and play in his home town."

Chelsea, who have spent almost 100 million pounds on new players this summer, could be grateful for the draw against what can be considered weaker opposition in Rome side Lazio, Sparta Prague of the Czech Republic and Turkish side Besiktas.

Chelsea's Argentine duo Juan Sebastian Veron and Hernan Crespo will relish a match with their old club Lazio.

Chelsea chairman Ken Bates said that his club's two games against Lazio would be the key to the group.

"I'm very happy. I think Claudio Ranieri and the team did a fantastic job getting us to the Champions League and with the strengthened side, the reinforcements, I think will put on a good show," he said.

Defending champions AC Milan got away with what looks like a relatively easy draw taking on Celta Vigo of Spain, four-times winners Ajax Amsterdam and Belgian champions Bruges.

Last year's losing finalists Juventus will also be confident of going through as they go up against Turkish side Galatasaray, Olympiakos of Athens and Spanish side Real Sociedad.

"We have been drawn in a very Latin, very balanced group," said former striker and club official Roberto Bettega.

"Overall it's very balanced and you feel that the absence of such as Borussia Dortmund and Newcastle have left certain groups less difficult than they would have been."

Two sides from each group go through to the last