

Sport

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Bid for Everton steps up

LONDON, Oct 16: The battle for ownership of English Premiership club Everton has moved up a gear with the news that a US finance house has had its bid accepted to buy out chairman Peter Johnson's 68 per cent controlling interest, club sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

On Monday, accountants representing Manhattan-based EM Warburg Pincus & Co can begin checking the books of the Goodison Park club with a view to the deal being completed.

It is believed that vice-chairman Bill Kenwright, who has been struggling for almost a year to win control of the club himself, will now have to join forces with another English consortium of businessmen to fit the US offer.

The Warburg Pincus bid, believed to have been brokered by computer games entrepreneur and Everton fan Paul Finnegan, has been presented to Johnson's Leeds-based brokers Arthur Anderson, and accepted by the now Jersey-based major shareholder.

A source said: "This is obviously subject to contract and due diligence."

In layman's terms, that means time for accountants to check the club's books, and that starts officially next week.

On Thursday the club hold their annual general meeting, where Kenwright could even be voted off the board by Johnson's majority control, and the scene is set for a battle royal between the US bidders and the theatre impresario.

An offer of around 30 million pounds (48 million dollars) from a group of high-powered English businessmen has already been rejected by Johnson.

Now shareholders expect Kenwright to hit back by agreeing to join forces with the business men's group to outbid Warburg Pincus.

Kevin Nolan, spokesman for the club's shareholders association, confirmed that his organisation know about the US bid and accept that it is genuine, but he said: "I will believe it has happened only when the cheque has cleared the bank."

Sources believe that the Americans offer is only the beginning of another lengthy, and increasingly bitter, battle for control of the club.

Everton, a big club with a large fan base, have been forced to live in the shadow of their Merseyside neighbours Liverpool for much of the past two decades. They last won England's top division in 1987, but picked up the FA Cup in 1995.

Arsenal interested in Donadoni

MILAN, Oct 16: Former AC Milan playmaker Roberto Donadoni, now 36, is being sought by top English club Arsenal, the Italian press reported on Thursday, reports AFP.

Donadoni, who is out of contract with the Italian champions, has been made an offer and is expected to respond within days.

Coach Arsene Wenger reportedly sees the Italian as a deluxe substitute for the Gunners' campaigns in the Premiership and the European Champions League; someone who could still make a major contribution even if he only played for an hour or so.

The midfielder became an Italian, European and world champion with AC Milan after joining in 1986 and staying almost uninterrupted until last season, when he made only nine appearances as they won the league.

Newcastle to miss Goma

LONDON, Oct 16: Newcastle United's French defender Alain Goma will be sidelined for up to six weeks with an Achilles injury, the club said Friday, reports AFP.

Newcastle received the news on the eve of their Premiership trip to Coventry City and Goma joins five other first team defenders on the casualty list.

Goma joined Newcastle from Paris St Germain.

There was some good news for Newcastle's manager Bobby Robson, as England winger Kieron Dyer has recovered from the calf problem which kept him out of Tuesday's 2-0 League Cup defeat at Birmingham City.

Fletcher counts on formers



LONDON, Oct 16 (Internet report): Former England captain Alec Stewart and Michael Atherton are poised for leading roles in a newly-formed management structure implemented by coach Duncan Fletcher for this winter's tour to South Africa and Zimbabwe.

England's two most senior players, who have both made 90 Test appearances, are expected to complete a 'think tank' committee to lead the 17-man party during the grueling four-month tour, which begins when they depart from Heathrow Airport on October 26.

They will join current captain Nasser Hussain and coach Fletcher on the management panel and the four-man committee will rule and decide on most of the tour issues, including selection.

There are certain structures I'm discussing with Nasser," revealed Fletcher, who formed a similar committee during his time at Glamorgan featuring captain Matthew Maynard, Tony Cottie, Hugh Morris and Steve Watkin.

"I want to put a management structure in place among the

players to give them more collective responsibility. It's the kind of thing I've done with every team that I've worked with and it seems to work."

The decision to appoint the committee is a marked departure from previous England regimes, who have relied on the coach, tour manager and captain to haul England off the bottom of the unofficial Test rankings before the end of his two-year contract.

"It doesn't just relate to matters on the field, it relates to everything," added Fletcher. "It's like setting up in the business world. They will throw up ideas and the captain is chief executive and he makes the decision on the ideas thrown about by the management team. I like to see the captain in charge and I sit on the committee as a consultant."

At least England will depart for Johannesburg with their chosen party with injury doubts Darren Gough, Alex Tudor and Dean Headley having all been given the all-clear to resume training by medical experts.

Captain Hussain confirmed: "Gough and Tudor were the main injury doubts, but both of them have been passed fit. They are raring to go, they have both started training again and have both spent a week down at Lille.

"They have been working on getting aerobically fit again after getting the medical all-clear. They haven't bowed yet, because we're saving that until they get out to South Africa."

DUNCAN FLETCHER

tain to take charge and signals the first of many changes proposed by Fletcher as he at-

Collymore unwanted



LONDON, Oct 16: Aston Villa manager John Gregory has insisted controversial striker Stan Collymore has no future at his club and is aiming to thrash out a compromise deal with Fulham, where he was on loan, reports AFP.

The London club are unwilling to pay any money up front for Collymore, who has just completed a three-month loan spell at Craven Cottage, but they are interested in a pay-as-you-play deal.

The First Division promotion-chasers, financially backed by Egyptian millionaire Mohamed al-Fayed, are ready to take over the remaining 18 months of Collymore's contract, worth some 1.75 million pounds (3 million dollars).

The main hurdle will come if Villa chairman Doug Ellis re-

fuses to budge from the original 3 million pounds asking fee for a player who cost a club record 7 million pounds.

Raul obliges Jordan

MADRID, Oct 16: Real Madrid striker Raul Gonzalez answered an unlikely request for an autograph this week — sending a signed club shirt to basketball player Michael Jordan, reports Reuters.

Spanish sports daily Marca

reported on Friday that Jordan made the request through friends holidaying in Valencia.

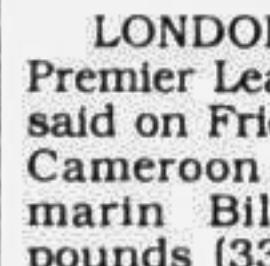
Raul, a long time Jordan follower, was happy to oblige with his own piece of fan mail inscribed on the famous white shirt.

"For Michael Jordan, the greatest sportsman of all time, from a great admirer, Raul Gonzalez," he wrote on the front of his number seven shirt.

Collymore, once considered

one of the brightest talents in British football, has suffered a dramatic loss of form since joining Villa and claimed he was suffering from psychological problems.

Billong joins West Ham



LONDON, Oct 16: English Premier League side West Ham said on Friday they had signed Cameroon international Romarim Billong for 200,000 pounds (\$333,300 dollars) from French side St. Etienne, reports Reuters.

Manager Harry Redknapp, who signed former England defender Gary Charles last week for one million pounds (\$1.67 million), said he needed a bigger squad to get the club through a hectic schedule.

"He is an experienced defender and is very versatile," Redknapp said of Billong.

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MLS playoffs



WASHINGTON, Oct 16: Regular season champion D.C. United remains the team to beat in Major League Soccer, seeking a third title and fourth finals berth in the four-year history of the United States football league, reports AFP.

United are on a four-match winless streak but had long ago clinched the top playoff berth and finished 23-9, leading the league with 65 goals behind the scoring skills of Marco Etcheverry, Jaime Moreno and Roy Lassiter.

Miami coach Ivo Wartmann made huge changes in the Fusion line-up with little improvement. The Fusion went 13-19 and open against United in the playoffs for the second year in a row.

Miami sent Colombian midfielder Carlos Valderrama to Tampa Bay, opening salary room to sign defender Arley Palacios, midfielders Edwin Gorter and Brian Kamler and forwards Welton and Eric Wynalda.

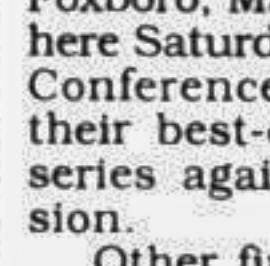
find Tampa Bay meeting Columbus, reigning champion Chicago facing Dallas and Western Conference champion Los Angeles playing Colorado.

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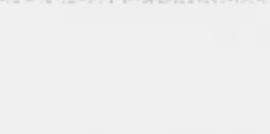
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