

Poland Friendly  
Lemerre leaves  
Henry out

PARIS Feb 17 (Reuters/AFI/Internet): Arsenal striker Thierry Henry's name was missing from the France squad announced on Thursday for the Euro 2000 warm-up at home to Poland on February 23.

Henry's first call-up since the 1998 World Cup finals had been anticipated by many.

He was picked for the A-team international against Belgium by coach Roger Lemerre and could still win a place in France's squad for the European championship finals in June.

Lemerre relied heavily on the players who won France the World Cup and who are now widely spread throughout European clubs.

In all 11 of the 18 players play outside of France with five based in England, four in Italy and two in Germany.

Metz goalkeeper Lionel Letizi, discarded for the World Cup finals, is preferred as Fabien Barthez's reserve to Olympique Marseille's Stephane Portois, recently suspended for four domestic matches for indisipline.

The 26-year-old Letizi had the heartbreak of being one of the six players eliminated by former coach Aime Jacquet as he pruned his final squad for the World Cup finals.

The French have been handed a tough group in the Euro 2000 finals being drawn against the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Denmark.

The Poland friendly will take place at the Stade de France in the northern suburbs of Paris.

#### SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Fabien Barthez (Monaco), Lionel Letizi (Metz)

Defenders: Lilian Thuram (Parma), Bixente Lizarazu (Bayern Munich), Marcel Desailly, Franck Leboeuf (both Chelsea), Laurent Blanc (Inter Milan), Vincent Candela (AS Roma)

Midfielders: Didier Deschamps (Chelsea), Patrick Vieira, Emmanuel Petit (both Arsenal), Zinedine Zidane (Real Madrid), Robert Pires (Olympique Marseille)

Forwards: Youri Djorkaeff (Kaiserslautern), David Trezeguet (Monaco), Stephane Guivarc'h (AJ Auxerre), Sylvain Wiltord (Girondins Bordeaux), Tony Vairellets (Olympique Lyon)

County commitment  
Shoaib, Saqlain  
await PCB verdict

LAHORE, Feb 17: The Pakistan Cricket Board is likely to decide on Friday whether to allow speed merchant Shoaib Akhtar and off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq to appear in the full English season, reports AFP.

Pakistan's tour to the West Indies in April, the Asia Cup in Dhaka in late May and the return series against Sri Lanka in July coincide with the English season.

"We will decide the matter in our meeting on Friday," Yawar Saeed, director of operations at the Pakistan board, said.

Akhtar, dubbed the Rawalpindi Express, was contracted by Nottinghamshire while Mushtaq has had a long-term contract with Surrey since 1997.

Nottinghamshire had set February 20 to finalise a decision on Akhtar and showed interest in rehiring New Zealand's all-rounder Chris Cairns.

Akhtar was banned by the International Cricket Council technical committee for having an illegal delivery action in December but was later allowed to play in the tri-series in Australia.

The 24-year-old bowler was automatically reinstated in Test cricket after a landmark decision of the ICC barred the technical committee from banning bowlers with suspect actions.

Akhtar is extremely keen to play the county season but reports here suggest the Pakistan board will not allow both bowlers to play the full season since they want a full strength team to take on the West Indies.

Pakistan will play three Tests and a triangular one-day series also involving Zimbabwe in the Caribbean.

#### BAF v'ball

TANGAIL, Feb 17: The last qualifying match of the BAF annual Interbase volleyball championship was held at the Base Paharkanchapur here yesterday, reports BSS.

Base Matiur Rahman beat Base Zulhur Haq 25-22, 25-21, 25-14.

#### Silly slip for

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order, can hit straight away."

Australian players were cautioned that New Zealand would be more innovative than other teams with the examples given of the batting order and shots.

Apparently the theme of the tour for the Australians is 'never satisfied.'

Australian manager Steve Bernard said the release of the papers wasn't a huge concern.

"Everybody has a game plan. The side has to know what they have to do and though we would prefer the opposition not know the plan it's not the end of the world," he said.

Bernard said he hadn't heard that the papers had gone astray but it was usual practice for the coach to slip them under players' doors.

"I will have to have a chat with the coach (John Buchanan) and tell him what happened," he said.

## Better late than never



LIVERPOOL, England, Feb 17 (Reuters): It's a story about Liverpool's decline that their recent move into the top three of the Premier League has brought such a wave of optimism to the club.

Three years ago a league table without Liverpool proudly nestled in the leading pack would have brought gags of amazement from their followers around the world.

The trophy room displaying four European Cups and a record 18 English titles led fans to believe the Reds top four status would be guaranteed with the end of the season arrived.

But as the Anfield outfit's biggest rivals Manchester United stole the Reds' thunder by winning last season's treble, Liverpool slumped to seventh in the league and the future looked bleak.

Criticism was piled on French manager Gerard Houllier for failing to inspire Liverpool after taking sole charge of the club following co-manager Roy Evans's resignation in September.

And his decision to snub British talent and sign six new foreign players in the summer angered some supporters.

So when Liverpool lost their first home match of the season to newly-promoted Watford and then slipped to 13th in the table the avalanche of criticism threatened to suffocate Houllier's plans.

But in an era when managers are sacked at the first sign of trouble the brave Liverpool board stood by their man — and have been repaid in spectacular fashion.

Keeper Sander Westerveld and defenders Stephane Henchoz and Sammi Hyppila are the focal point of a defence that has conceded just 21 goals in 25 games — the lowest in the Premier League.

Record signing Dietmar Hamann has played a crucial role in midfield and equal top scorer Titi Camara has been outstanding in the absence of injured duo Robbie Fowler and Michael Owen.

Houllier added: "In the

draw on Liverpool's chances of winning the title.

He is quick to preach the Anfield gospel that a Champions League place is the best is what he can hope to achieve. He said: "I am aware that some people have talked about us for the title, but I never have."

"What we have there now is very encouraging for the future. When you start a season with seven new players, most of whom have not experienced the rhythm and intensity of the Premiership, it is largely a journey into the unknown."

"But over the last sixteen games I think we have won even more points than Manchester United, but we are still progressing."

While Houllier can lay claim to an expertise in the international transfer market that few English managers are blessed with, he has also been boosted by a new crop of talented youngsters coming through the Reds ranks.

That has included the rise of midfielder Steven Gerrard, who is being tipped to feature in England's next game against Argentina — despite still being just 19-year-old.

But Liverpool's current success has not come about through luck, Houllier said to be strong in the summer by ensuring some in the Reds' camp, like Paul Ince, were removed.

That could have led to a dressing room revolt but a pre-season trip to Austria gave the players a chance to assess the new signings.

And the mood of the team changed as the little known Sammi Hyppila and Titi Camara stood out in training.

That factor won over the team as they realised they could be part of a bright new future for the club.

But Houllier claims there is still a long way to go before the club reaches the levels he is aiming for.

He said: "The fact we have the best defence in the Premiership shows we are on the right lines. Don't forget that we are still in a rebuilding phase."

"I know people are impatient for success. I'm sorry, but things take time. Bill Shankly had two-and-a-half years to get Liverpool out of the Second Division."

But Houllier is refusing to be

## Thuram states a sad fact



MILAN, Feb 17: World Cup winner Lilian Thuram took his racist tormentors to task on Wednesday, but warned his fellow black players that the battle against racism in Italy will be a long one, reports AFP.

Thuram, one of three Parma players to be targeted by racist Lazio fans on Sunday night, hit back in an interview with the Gazzetta dello Sport.

He received the prompt support of fellow professionals, both black and white, but did not appear optimistic of a quick victory.

There is no respect for diversity.

In his own life, the Guadeloupe-born captain said he was inspired by several role models.

"Cassius Clay, or Mohammed Ali if you prefer, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X. People who fought to defend the dignity of black people. Have individuals ever had to defend the dignity of white people? I don't think so."

"It seems to me that in the globalised, Internet-connected world of today, where everyone knows everything, where making money is people's main objective, a great deal has been lost from a spiritual point of view."

He added: "I think it's impossible to avoid certain kinds of behaviour," he said of racist soccers.

Their reasoning, whether they're aware of it or not is: black people are like monkeys, and we boo them so that they can understand this concept..."

"Attitudes like this exist throughout the civilised world, certainly not just in Italy."

And let's tell the truth once and for all - until 100 years ago eminent white scholars - university professors and learned sociologists - claimed that the black race was inferior to the white one.

"Slavery, abolished only in the last century - and that too has to be borne in mind - was unfortunately already been done."

Support from fellow footballers has meanwhile been swift.

Another member of France's World Cup squad, Inter Milan's white defender Laurent Blanc, said: "From my experience in France and Spain, the problem of racism is not restricted to Italy too, I believe."

Today's boozing is the result of that culture which, logically enough, cannot disappear in a short space of time after having been dominant for centuries. And the roots of that way of thinking still exist - it's pointless us having any illusions about that."

The battle is going to be a long one."

He went on: "People ought to know that the civilisation considered by everyone to have been the most advanced was the Egyptian. And the first Egyptians were black. So how can people claim we are an inferior race?"

As for his tormentors to football grounds, he said: "I am

not a monkey. I am a man. I know it would be better to pretend nothing had happened, to not attach any importance to people like them."

But the problem is that the number of fans like them is increasing all the time. And therefore, a way of dealing with the question has to be found.

"It seems to me that it and hope it doesn't happen again. Also because I don't see how it cannot but wound me and my other black teammates as well."

Thuram's partner in Parma's central defence, Italy international Fabio Cannavaro, said: "I can't stand this boozing any longer."

"If we live in a civilised society, and I think we do, we have to do something about people like these at grounds. Football should be about joy and entertainment."

It also represents an important step in PBL's strategic pursuit of Asian convergence opportunities and heralds our intended expansion of our television and Internet business into the Asian region."

Nine was selected after an international tender process.

DD strikes deal with Nine Net

SYDNEY, Feb 17: Australian media mogul Kerry Packer's Nine Network has been signed by India's national broadcaster Doordarshan to produce television coverage of all international cricket in India up to 2002, reports AFP.

James Packer, chairman of Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd. which owns Nine, said the network would also train Doordarshan production staff.

This partnership of Nine and Doordarshan, the world's largest commercial broadcast network, will, I believe, lead to other opportunities to pursue opportunities in alliance," Packer said in a statement.

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## WICB looking for coach, manager

LONDON, Feb 17: The West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) will interview applicants for the posts of coach and manager this weekend, a board spokesman said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

He said an announcement was unlikely before late next week and declined to name the applicants. Clive Lloyd stepped down as manager after the tour of New Zealand when West Indies lost both Tests and all five one-day internationals.

The Trinidad Guardian newspaper said Viv Richards, coach on the ill-fated New Zealand tour, was one of five applicants being interviewed for the coaching post for the forthcoming home series against Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

Apparently the theme of the tour for the Australians is 'never satisfied.'

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## A dahlia called Beckenbauer

HAMBURG, Germany, Feb 17: German footballing legend Franz Beckenbauer is set to receive yet another honour it was revealed on Wednesday - a dahlia named after him, reports AFP.

Beckenbauer, who won the World Cup both as a player and a coach - in 1974 and 1990 respectively - will be present for the ceremony in Hamburg on September 2, the stage for a World Cup qualifier with Greece, where the dahlia will be unveiled.

According to the Hamburg gardeners, who have already honoured 1997 Tour de France winner Jan Ullrich and former women's world number one Steffi Graf in the same fashion, the dahlia will have violet-red and blue petals in memory of the two clubs Beckenbauer played for - Bayern Munich and Hamburg.

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"I know people are impatient for success. I'm sorry, but things take time. Bill Shankly had two-and-a-half years to get Liverpool out of the Second Division."

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## 'SL cricket on the rise'

LAHORE, Feb 17: Sri Lankan cricket coach Dav Whatmore said his team's strong performance shows the country's resurgence in international cricket, reports AFP.

"The results are encouraging and indicate the team is on the rise but we still have a lot more areas to work on before the