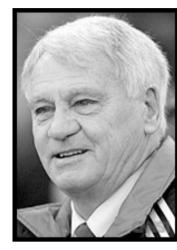
## **Catch the Magpies**



AP. London

Few people would have bet that Newcastle would be the Premier League leader going into the busy, halfway stage of the season.

But Bobby Robson's Magpies go into Wednesday's game against neighbour Middlesbrough with a three-point lead with the leading contenders -- Arsenal, Liverpool, Leeds, Manchester United and Chelsea just behind.



**BOBBY ROBSON** 

With everyone playing four games in an 11-day spell, someone usually makes a break in the title race. While Newcastle, whose last league title triumph was in 1927, holds a three-point advantage after back-toback victories at Arsenal and Leeds, Robson's team aren't expected to be in the same position when May comes around

The Magpies should collect three points from a home game against lowly Middlesbrough, however, and stay top for at least another round of games

which jumped back to second after winning 2-1 at Liverpool on Sunday, has the top game of Chelsea, which is just three points behind the Gunners after a 5-1 crushing of Bolton on Sunday.

Liverpool has a tricky game at eighth-place Aston Villa while Leeds goes to Bolton and Manchester United visits Everton. David O'Leary's Leeds has con-

ceded eight goals in its last three Premier League games compared with only nine in its previous 15. "We've made too many poor individ-

ual mistakes," said O'Leary, who may be without back injury victim Harry Kewell and Dominic Matteo [groin] on Wednesday.

'If you are not defending right then it will cost you and, in two of the last three games, it has done. We've got to put it right -- starting at Bolton.'

After losing 3-1 at home to Newcastle. Arsenal rebounded with a win at Liverpool and has midfielder Patrick Chelsea at Highbury after suspension probably to face his former

Chelsea has hit a spell of sparkling form which included a 4-0 beating of Liverpool nine days ago although manager Claudio Ranieri admitted he had to give his team a verbal roasting at half time of its beating of

"The first 35 minutes were awful," said the Italian, whose team fell 1-0 down early before hitting back with five. "In fact, it was unbelievable as the players forgot everything. I said that the warmup had finished and 'now please play football.'"

Liverpool, hot favorite to win the title just two weeks ago, has slipped from first to third after its losses to Chelsea and Newcastle and, with Michael Owen stuck on 99 career goals during that spell, seems to have forgotten how to score.

By contrast. Manchester United crushed Southampton 6-1 on Saturday not long after its 5-0 beating of Derby. Written off just three weeks ago after sliding to ninth and 11 points off the lead, the defending champion has hit form with Dutch striker Ruud van Nistelrooy taking his tally for the season to 21. The Reds have turned it round

despite leaving England captain David Beckham on the bench, citing with a back problem. After five games without starting, Beckham may be back against Everton although French goalkeeper Fabien Barthez may be out because of an injury he suffered when he collected with a goalpost.

Down at the foot of the standings. Ipswich hopes to follow up its surprise 2-1 win at Tottenham by beating next to last Leicester at Portman Road and climbing away from last place on goal difference.

Second from last Derby goes to fifth from last West Ham while Southampton has a tough game at home to seventh place Tottenham. Other games on Wednesday are Blackburn-Sunderland and Fulham-

Division one leader Burnley holds a four-point lead going into its visit to lowly Rotherham while second place Wolves, which announced the hiring of Leicester striker Dean Sturridge on Monday, hosts midstandings Preston.

In a full schedule of Scottish Premier League games, Celtic hopes to bounce back from its first loss of the season by beating third place Livingston at home.

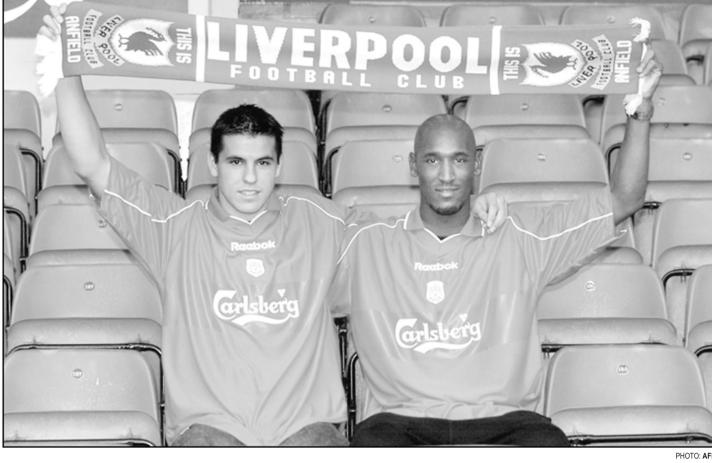
Martin O'Neill's team tumbled 2-0 at Aberdeen on Saturday and its lead over second place Rangers was cut to 10 points even though the Hoops have a game in hand.

Rangers visit struggling Hibernian which means manager Alex McLeish must return to Easter Road barely three weeks after leaving for

#### **FIXTURES**

Following are fixtures of Wednesday's matches (league positions in parentheses, kick-off time 1500 GMT unless stated):

Arsenal (2) v Chelsea (6) (1200), Aston Villa (8) v Liverpool (3)



Liverpool's latest signings, Czech Republic international Milan Baros (L) and Frenchman Nicolas Anelka, display a club scarf after they were unveiled at

# Anelka couldn't wait

Football

**INTERNET, Liverpool** 

France striker Nicolas Anelka completed a move to Liverpool from Paris St Germain on Monday and said he had jumped at the opportunity to join the UEFA Cup winners. Anelka, who won the league and

FA Cup Double with Arsenal during a two-year spell from 1997-99, has joined Liverpool until the end of the season with a view to a permanent "I decided I wanted to leave Paris

St Germain, and when I knew I had the opportunity to come to Liverpool could not refuse," the 22-year-old told a news conference

"When I left Arsenal, I never said I did not like England. My problems were all in my head.

(1500), Blackburn rovers (12) v

Sunderland (11) (1500), Bolton

Wanderers (14) v Leeds United (4)

(1200), Everton (9) v Manchester

United (5) (1500), Fulham (10) v

Charlton Athletic (13) (1200),

Ipswich Town (20) v Leicester City

(19) **(1500)**, Newcastle United (1) v

Middlesbrough (16) **(1500)**,

Southampton (17) v Tottenham

Hotspur (7) (1200), West Ham

United (15) v Derby County (18)

"In your career, you cannot be

things do not go as you want. You have to be strong mentally to overcome those things," said the striker. who has a reputation as a moody but highly talented player.

Czech forward Milan Baros was also unveiled at the same news conference as Liverpool look to provide support for England striker Michael Owen in the goals department, particularly after the departure of Robbie Fowler to title rivals Leeds United.

Assistant manager Phil Thompson, who is standing in for Gerard Houllier as the French manager recovers from emergency heart surgery, said: "Gerard Houllier rang me on Friday and asked what I thought about signing Nicolas. "I thought about it for a few sec-

onds and told him I thought it was a "Robbie Fowler left a few weeks ioined us, he is a non-EC player and "Now I hope to recover the level takes our quota up to five. We knew was playing at earlier. Although this

we needed someone else and.

when the opportunity came to sign

handedly won the title for them.

achieve that ambition with a club like

Anelka, who left Arsenal for Real

"Some things that happened at

Madrid, has had problems settling in

Madrid and Paris did not make it

happens in many careers -- not just

at all three of his previous clubs.

Liverpool is a dream.

nity to miss.

a long time. Nicolas, it was too good an opportu-"The premier league seems to be "Everybody knows that, when he more suited to my qualities plaved at Arsenal, he almost singlebecause, when I played at Arsenal, I

the ball quickly and let me use my "That shows he can cope with the quality needed to play in the Premiership and, like Milan, we are "Liverpool have some outstanddelighted to have him here.' ing players and I am particularly Baros said: "It was always my

excited about the prospect of playambition to play in England and to ing alongside Michael Owen. After a difficult time at PSG,

scoring just two league goals this season following his 218-million franc (US dollars 29.61 million) move from Real Madrid, Anelka needs a good run of form to play himself into France's World Cup

is only a loan. I hope I can make an

impression and stay in Liverpool for

was with players who could give me

### Bowyer may be offered new contract

Football

**INTERNET,** Leeds

Leeds look set to offer disgraced midfielder Lee Bowyer a new contract despite fining him four weeks wages (US dollars 88,000) for his drunken behavior on the night an Asian student was brutally beaten in a street attack

After two trials that put Bowyer's England career on hold although he continued playing for Leeds, a jury cleared the talented but fiery midfielder of charges causing grievous bodily harm to 19-year-old student Sarfraz Najeib and affray, or

Najeib, attacked by a gang in a street fight, suffered fractures to his nose, cheekbone and left leg, and his family has announced they will take civil action against Bowyer, Leeds and all those accused in the

While declaring his innocence of taking part in any violence, Bowyer admitted being drunk on the night and the case prompted calls for

But Leeds owner Peter Ridsdale and manager David O'Leary have Bowyer a new contract. Bowyer has only 18 months to run on his current oné and, at the very least, a new one would increase his value in the transfer market.

"Lee Bowyer was found not guilty of all charges in court," Ridsdale said. "As a player who has 18 months on his contract, it makes sense to negotiate a new one, given

ruling."
O'Leary had already declared his desire to keep Bowyer at Elland Road.

"Do I want him to stay and sign a new contract? Yes," the Leeds manager said. "And, if there is anything about him, he will."

#### **Leeds fans Murder** trial adjourned being charged with offences rang-

Football

REUTERS, Istanbul

Turkish fans accused of involvement in the killing of two Leeds United supporters last year have had their court case adjourned until February.
Leeds supporters Kevin Speight

and Christopher Loftus were stabbed to death in street brawls ahead of a UEFA Cup semifinal match against Galatasaray in April

ing from murder to assault. A Turkish court on Monday

adjourned the trial to February 15. The six charged with murder face up to 30 years in prison if convicted, though under Turkish law they may serve only 12 years of their sentences if they get time off for good

All but one of the accused have been released on bail during the hearing. A presiding judge had previously hinted that a verdict might be reached before the end of

An overloaded judicial system means many cases in Turkey can



Turks (L-R) Kazim Dalga, Emrah Kaygusuz and Murat Yakis, who are accused of involvement in the killing of two Leeds United supporters last year, attending the court trial at Istanbul on December 24.

### Richer than the rest



REUTERS, London

In terms of income, English soccer has never been healthier

This year came the news that income had surpassed the onebillion-pound mark and, fuelled by new television deals, was likely to reach 1.5 billion for 2001. In 1983, BBC and ITV combined

to pay 2.3 million pounds (US dollars3.31 million) for the rights to televise their pick of the matches played by the 92 clubs in the football A three-year BSkyB and ITV

deal, which came into effect this season, is worth 1.6 billion pounds for the premier league, while the football league will receive 315 million pounds over the same period from ITV Sport.
There are seven English clubs in

the top 20 richest clubs in the world, according to a list published this month by British accountants Deloitte and Touche, with three more hovering just outside. Manchester United are the richest club in the world with a turnover of 117 million pounds in the 1999-2000 season and Chelsea are eighth with 76.7 million.

Some observers saw the huge cash boost as a chance for English football clubs to finally shake off

decades of debt and even start making profits. "I just hope that this opportunity is taken -- I fear it will not be," Gerry Boon, head of Deloitte and Touche's Football Industry team wrote before

the new deals. His fears appear to have been realised as clubs show an ability to spend the money as fast as they

receive it. Chelsea announced in October that their parent company. Chelsea Village, had long-term debts of 97.7 million pounds, while Leeds United have spent more than 90 million pounds on new players since David O'Leary took over as manager in

Spiraling inflation in players' Manchester United skipper Roy Keane is reported to be negotiating a new contract more than doubling his current 52,000 pounds a week -- has further eaten into club funds.

Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea spent more than 40 million pounds on wages in the 1999-2000 season, according to Deloitte and Touche and many clubs face a bill worth at least half of total turnover.

The situation in the football

league is worse as clubs try to pend their way into the top flight. Seven clubs in the First Division spent more than 100 percent of turnover on wages in the 1999/2000.

Biggest spenders Blackburn Rovers saw 172 percent of turnover going to players with Fulham spending 144 percent

Both clubs are lucky to have rich benefactors. Blackburn are backed by local businessman Jack Walker who set up a trust fund for the club before his death last year, and Harrods tycoon Mohammed Al aved own's Fulham.

Big spending sometimes works. Blackburn and Fulham are now in the premier league but failure can be disastrous as Nottingham Forest and Queens Park Rangers have discovered. Forest, twice European champi-

ons, spent 115 percent of their turnover on wages and earlier this month saw their shares suspended the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) because they failed to publish annual accounts on time. In March the club reported first-

half losses of 2.7 million pounds -representing a cash loss of about 105.000 pounds a week. QPR, who were relegated from

the First Division last year, went into administration in April with losses listed at 27 million pounds over three years from 1997. The club have yet to find a new owner

Both Forest and QPR were among a number of clubs who raised capital through stock exchange flotations in the late

Only two of those clubs' shares are now worth more than their flotation price, with most having lost more than 50 percent of their value. Further down the league structure, virtually all clubs have to rely

on investment from owners to

survive at all. Only five Football League clubs had an operating profit in 1999-2000. These clubs have also seen what was traditionally their major source of revenue -- transfer fees from bigger clubs -- greatly reduced by the aftermath of the Bosman ruling, which allows players to leave

on free transfers when their contract

The worst news for football however, is that the golden teat that s television may be about to dry up. "Everyone I know who runs a TV

operation in this country, whether free-to-air or pay, knows we are paying too much for football and we are determined we are not going to pay this much again," said BBC director general Greg Dyke in November.

"There is no chance of anyone paying such large sums again," he

ITV saw live football as the ideal way to get subscribers to sign up for their digital channel but coverage of the sport may have reached saturation point. In one week in December, a

dedicated fan could have watched

17 live matches -- more than 25 hours of football ranging from Arsenal's 3-1 Champions League defeat of Juventus to Exeter's 0-0 draw with Dagenham and Redbridge in the FA Cup second round. Pay-per-view has hardly been an unqualified success, with some matches being watched by more

people in the stadium than on television. The two companies which own ITV Digital, Granada and Carlton, have promised to fulfil their obligations for the period of the Football League deal but both are deeply in

the red having also been hit by a recession in advertising. The service has already cost its owners some 788 million pounds and needs a further 360 million to keep it going until 2004, when it is due to break even.

Despite the gloomy picture, some observers point out that it was ever thus with football in the land of its birth. English football has always

spent more than it earned, with the shortfall being made up by owners. It has never been a great investment and those buying shares in clubs have been either fans or, more recently, media firms looking

to have a voice in the negotiation of television deals. Thanks to the Taylor report in the wake of the Hillsborough stadium tragedy in 1989, English stadiums are now the envy of the world. Just this month Arsenal received planning permission for a new 60,000 capacity, state-of-the-art, all-seater

stadium. Crowds are up and merchandising and matchday "extras," such as catering, are better exploited than



Superstar Ronaldo sending a video message wishing his fans across

### Ronaldo wishes fans

the world Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Football

INTERNET, Rio de Janeiro

Inter Milan's Brazilian superstar Ronaldo arrived in Rio de Janeiro with one and a half hour's delay on Tuesday, happy to meet wife Milene, his mother Sonia and above all little Ronald who welcomed him at the airport.

During his short meeting with the journalists he declared himself very happy to be able to spend his Christmas vacations with his family in Brazil and expressed his satisfaction for his present physical condition, thus reassuring his supporters after last Sunday's muscular prob-

He also highlighted his team's good performance in the Italian league, due to the good relationships among the players, all strongly determined to get to the final target: the "scudetto".

After the press conference at the airport, Ronaldo went home to rest and then take part in the forthcoming Christmas celebra-

For Christmas, Ronaldo finds two presents: Inter who are on the top of the table at the end of 2001, and the reassuring diagnosis about the injury from the

El Fenomeno left a video as a present, where he wishes a merry Christmas and a happy New Year to the fans of all the world, making an appointment for 2002: the Championship and a lot of goals.

Here you have an autograph in French. Ronaldo doesn't



# **Big Phil's philosophy**



Brazilians, spoilt by a rich past championships without worrying interests here and there, there are which has given them talents such as Garrincha, Pele, Rivelino, Zico and Socrates, believe that watching their national team should be an uplifting experience in which they are treated to exhibitions of style

The four-time world champion, it is often said, should play with happi-

For Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari, however, happiness is a more mundane manner of scoring more goals than the opposition.

"You play happily when you get

Felipao (Big Phil) told Reuters in an interview. "How can you play happily if you lose? You play to win." "Imagine if we go to the World Cup and we play three wonderful,

the right result," the man known as

out of this world games in the first round -- and we don't qualify." "If we have to play ugly football to reach our objective, we will play ugly. What's the point of a cup? To

be champions." Scolari, for example, cannot understand why Brazilians still rave about their 1982 World Cup team -which set the tournament alight only to crash out in the second round to Italy -- yet have dispatched the victorious 1994 side to the dustbin of football history.

Carlos Alberto Parreira's team.

"It amazes me." Scolari said. "I

which ended a 24-year wait for Brazil's fourth title in the United States, has been rudely dismissed as being not attractive enough to

think that Parreira's determination in 1994 should be revered.' "Parreira demonstrated the importance of having belief in your work. Everybody was against him, but he was determined to achieve his objective and he did. And he made the players believe in it as

well. I give great value to that win."

Scolari added: "I don't want to say that I don't value what we did in 1982. It was a spectacular team -but at the moment when we could have used the rules to our advantage, we kept on attacking, trying to please the crowd." The team inspired by Zico,

Junior and Socrates, needing a draw to reach the semi-finals, lost 3-2. "That didn't go down in history as Brazil's Cup," said Scolari. "The person who went down in history was Parreira in 1994.

Scolari, who guided Brazil through the final stages of a turbu-

sure it maintained its record of taking part in every World Cup, has a reputation as a coach who wins how things work...there are always about whether he pleases the

In the past, he has publicly chastised his team for not committing enough fouls or even failing to

But he says gamesmanship

happens everywhere -- the only difference is that in South America it is almost seen as a virtue

"I think everybody does it, but the



**LUIZ FELIPE SCOLARI** 

media talk much more about South Americans doing it. When it happens in Europe, the opponent swears and curses as if it were something out of this world, as if it were unethical.

"Here, in South America, it is thought of as merit, even cunning, they like to think they have pulled a fast one on the opponent and the referee. "Another problem is that in

Brazil, they don't know how to foul. They commit the most ridiculous fouls, on the touchline, near the opponent's penalty area. "European referees can be much stricter, they don't accept

some of things which go on here. This is something we have to make the Brazilian athletes aware of." Scolari, who became Brazil's fourth coach in less than a year when he took over in June, admitted he had a difficult start. Having made his name in the south of Brazil, his

"At first, I felt the pressure and I felt difficulties in adapting because I

appointment was greeted with

skepticism in Rio de Janeiro and

Sao Paulo.

have always been a club coach and

when I got to the national team it "You have to know a few things, it

takes three months to get to learn

people who prefer one player, not the other, that sort of thing.' As Brazil struggled to qualify for the World Cup and was knocked out of the Copa America by modest Honduras, Scolari said his two sons -- aged 10 and 17 -- were goaded at

school and asked him if it was worth it was carrying on. "In time and as I began getting the taste for the Selecao, I told them it was worth it," he said. "It got to me

a bit as well, I was dying to speak my mind but I had to bite my tongue." Scolari is now looking ahead and says he has decided on 15 or 16 of his 23-man squad for Japan and

South Korea.

The emphasis, he said, will be on harmony and unity and there will be little place for tempermental big name players -- known in Brazil as "Big Medals" -- demanding special privileges.

a big family. Everybody has to get on with everybody else. "Teams which have a good squad, are well-organized and no big stars are getting to the front," he said, citing the examples of Spanish club Alaves, Italy's Chievo and

"In my opinion, a football team,

including a national team, has to be

same with national teams.' "The problem here is that our players think you can decide a game with one moment of the unexpected. So they don't need to train. This is a pure aberration but it is our culture."

Scolari savs that Ronaldo, just

Brazil's own Sao Caetano. "It's the

getting over a two-year injury layoff, remains Brazil's big uncertainty for the World Cup and refuses to being difficult to get on with. "Ronaldo is an incognito because he has to play, he has only

just started playing more than 45 minutes. We have four months to observe him and maybe pick him for some friendlies, but it depends on how he reacts.' "There is no veto on anybody," he added. "If I had a veto, Edilson would not be with me," he added,

referring to the striker with whom he

has fallen out with in the past. "I want the best for Brazil. And the best for Brazil is not necessarily the best for me."

discard 35-year-old striker Romario, despite his reputation for