

Houllier staying with Lyon

AFP, Paris

Lyon will retain Gerard Houllier as manager for next season, despite the club's failure to make it past the last 16 of the Champions League, club chairman Jean-Michel Aulas has said.

The former Liverpool boss is on the cusp of guiding the team to a sixth consecutive French league title and the second under his tutelage.

But the loss to AS Roma in the last 16 of the Champions League at a time when Lyon were being touted as potential winners, cast doubts over his position.

Long-time chairman Aulas, however said, there was no doubt in his mind that Houllier would stay where he was.

"Of course he will be with the club next season," Aulas told L'Equipe sports daily.

"You should have no doubt about that he is staying where he is. It's true certain players will be leaving, not because we are unhappy with them but because it is the strategy of the club to transfer players when they are at their best and can attract top fees."

Houllier apart, Aulas said that two senior members of the team - goalkeeping Gregory Coupet and Brazilian midfielder Juninho - would definitely be staying.

Lehmann to decide Gunners' future

AFP, London

Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann could decide in the coming week whether or not he will stay with the club.

The 37-year-old German veteran's contract expires at the end of this season and Arsenal, in line with club policy on senior players, are offering a 12-month extension.

Lehmann is thought to have wanted the security of a two-year deal but claims he is close to making a decision.

He told Arsenal TV Online: "We will see, I think there will be a decision within the next few days or next week."

"I would like to play here, I have always said I would like to stay but it is a situation where no decision has been made yet. It is difficult to talk about it (now)."

Park signs Nike deal

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's top striker Park Ji-Sung of English Premier League team Manchester United has signed a long-term contract with sports-wear company Nike, the firm's local affiliate said Friday.

"Nike has renewed its contract with Park," said a spokeswoman for Nike Sports Korea, adding the new contract runs until May 2019, as compared to the previous four-year one.

"Park merits our sponsorship in light of his achievement and influence in the world of football," she said.

Nike did not reveal the value of the deal but sports dailies here said it was believed to be worth more than 12 million dollars.

MU seal Ronaldo extension

Football

AFP, London

Portuguese winger Cristiano Ronaldo has agreed terms on a new five-year contract at Manchester United, the club announced Friday on its official website.

The deal will mean that 22-year-old Ronaldo, one of the most exciting talents in world football, will stay at Old Trafford until at least June 2010.

"It is fantastic news," said United manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

"It emphasises the point that Cristiano is happy here and that he is at the right club.

"He has a great relationship with the team, staff and the fans and he will go on to be one of Manchester United's great players."

The announcement ended months of speculation that Ronaldo could be on his way out of England at the end of the season with Spanish giants Real Madrid cited among the suitors.

"I am delighted," said Ronaldo of his new contract.

"I spoke with Sir Alex and (club chairman) David Gill about my future and everyone knew that I wanted to stay."

"I am very happy at the club and I want to win trophies and hopefully we will do that this season."

Ronaldo, who joined United as a teenager from Sporting Lisbon in 2003 for 17.6 million euros, has been a key element in a season that sees sitting atop the English Premiership, in the semifinals of the Champions League for the first time since 2002 and through to the semifinals of the English FA Cup.

He scored two goals at Old Trafford on Tuesday in the 7-1 crushing of AS Roma in the last

eight of the Champions League.

Ronaldo has also played a starring role for Portugal with whom he has already won 46 times, appearing notably in the 2004 Euro finals at home and last year's World Cup finals in Germany.

Team-mate Ryan Giggs was full of praise for his fellow forward's contribution at Manchester United.

"I don't believe there is anyone

who could rival him as being the best player in the world," the Welshman said.

"For someone in his position, and of his age, to be as consistent as he has been, is remarkable.

"His performances have been brilliant. To secure his future for the next five years is great news for everyone."

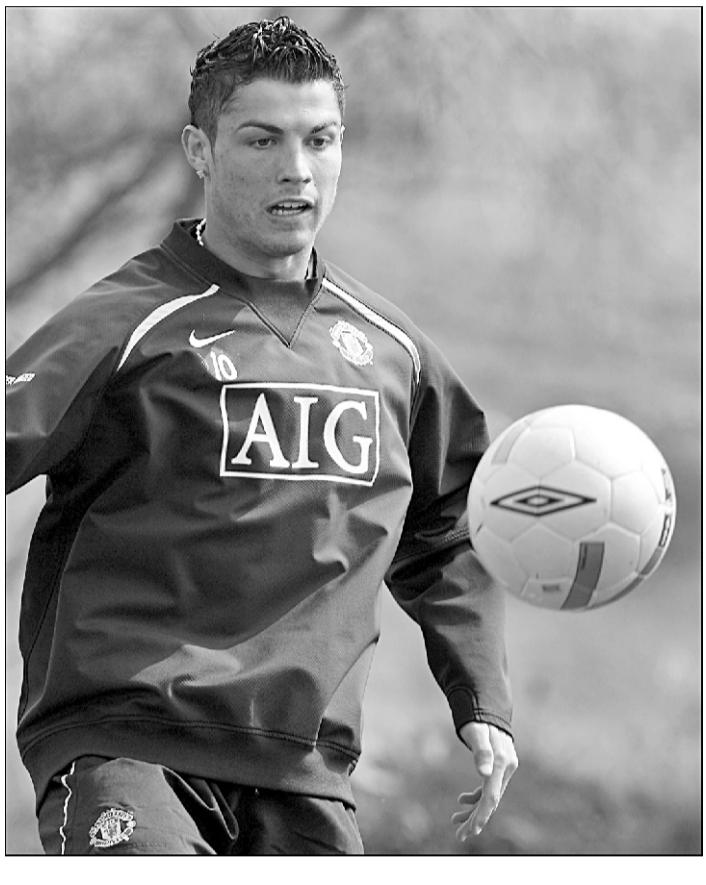


PHOTO: AFP
Manchester United winger Cristiano Ronaldo takes part in a training session at the club's training ground at Carrington in Manchester on Friday.

Gunners' test of nerve

Football



Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger knows the development of his talented young team is in danger as the battle for the final Champions League place hots up on Saturday.

Wenger's side are currently in possession of fourth position in the Premiership, which guarantees entry into the Champions League qualifying rounds. But they will lose that coveted spot if Bolton win at the Emirates Stadium this weekend.

Just a few weeks ago it seemed certain the Gunners would finish in the top four, but a dismal run of just one point and one goal from their last four matches has allowed fifth-placed Bolton to close the gap to two points.

Wenger has endured a frustrating season which has seen his players show plenty of potential, without delivering the trophies that a club of Arsenal's stature expects.

Failure to qualify for the Champions League would be the final straw as it would halt the progress of young talents like Cesc Fabregas, Gael Clichy and Denilson, as well as costing the London club millions of pounds in lost revenue.

John Djourou is another of Arsenal's fine prospects and he warned his teammates they will have to show solidarity to get the result they desperately need.

"Everyone knows how tough it is to play Bolton, be it at home or there,"

Djourou said. "They are a really, really hard team to break down. They're very aggressive. They play long balls but they also have attacking, technical players in the side."

"We must try to get the team together again and try to do as well as we did last year. We are not pointing fingers. We are all together in this."

Allardyce loves to claim he has all the answers to Wenger's tactical ploys and he is confident of upsetting the Gunners again.

"We know how to play against them," Allardyce said. "Tactically, we are astute enough to work out what their strengths are and to expose their weaknesses."

"We are good at working them out and stopping them playing to their best. We haven't got the same fears now that we used to have about going to play at Arsenal."

While the stakes are high at the Emirates Stadium, there will be no less anxiety and drama at Bramall Lane, where Sheffield United host West Ham in a crucial clash between two sides scrapping to avoid relegation.

Both clubs are in the drop zone, with second bottom West Ham two points behind United. But Alan Curbishley's visitors still believe they can get out of trouble after three successive wins breathed new life into a previously moribund campaign.

Arsenal defender Lucas Neill said: "We're the form team, which is a nice feeling when there are only six games to go," he said "A draw

may not be the worst result at United, because we will still give ourselves a chance."

The Blades in contrast have lost four of their last five matches, but boss Neil Warnock remains defiant.

He said: "Everyone seems to think that West Ham are just going to take the points off us so I want my lads to go out there and prove them wrong. If anyone thinks we're a pushover then they're wrong."

Lawrie Sanchez has just five games to save Fulham from relegation and prove he is the right man to lead them on a permanent basis.

Sanchez takes his new team to Reading just days after he was on a skiing holiday in Austria. Now the Northern Ireland coach, who has only been appointed as caretaker manager at Craven Cottage until the end of the season, has to stop Fulham's downhill slide towards the Championship.

They are just above the drop zone after seven games without a win ended in Chris Coleman's sacking on Tuesday and Sanchez faces a tough task to halt the decline.

FIXTURES

Saturday (all 1400GMT)

Arsenal v Bolton, Manchester City v Liverpool, Middlesbrough v Aston Villa, Portsmouth v Newcastle, Reading v Fulham, Sheffield United v West Ham

Sunday

Everton v Charlton (1400GMT), Wigan v

Tottenham (1230GMT)

PICK OF THE DAY



Desh Bideshey Ranna
On Channel i at 6:00pm
Cooking Show
Host: Keka Ferdousi

Maradona back in hospital

AFP, Buenos Aires

Champions

League semi-finalists AC Milan will visit Messina on Sunday justifiably confident of repeating last year's 3-1 win away at the Stadio San Filippo.

But despite blowing Bayern Munich out of Europe's premier club competition only days ago, Milan know they must ride the wave of success to have come their way of late if they are to even appear in next year's tournament.

The football legend was rushed early in the morning for emergency treatment at a hospital 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of Buenos Aires after reporting severe abdominal pain.

Sico said Maradona, 46, could spend two or three days in the hospital, but said he was stable and that doctors had "eased his pain."

Maradona was accompanied to the hospital by his girlfriend Veronica Ojeda, in whose house he was staying after being discharged from a private Buenos Aires hospital on Wednesday.

The former captain of Argentina's winning World Cup side and star for Barcelona and Napoli spent 13 days in the hospital from late March to be treated for excessive drinking which sparked a return of chronic hepatitis, which he has suffered for years.

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