

Premiership News, Gossip & Rumours **ALL CHANGE AT LEICESTER AND DERBY**

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Two of the Premiership's struggling clubs – East Midlands neighbours Leicester City and Derby County – took advantage of the two-week break from League action to make managerial changes. The departures of Peter Taylor from Filbert Street and Jim Smith from Pride Park were not unexpected as the boards of both clubs attempt to halt disappointing starts to the season before it is too late.

Taylor is left reflecting on what a difference a year can make. Twelve months ago, he could do no wrong as he guided Leicester to the top of the Premiership before being named England's caretaker manager for the game with Italy in November. One year later he is no longer Leicester's boss, no longer part of the England coaching set-up and no longer in work.

His demise began with a shock FA Cup defeat by Second Division Wycombe Wanderers that precipitated a record-breaking run of eight consecutive Premiership defeats. After only one win in eight Premiership starts this season, Leicester's chairman John Elsom terminated his manager's contract with the Foxes at the foot of the table. The decision has been taken to safeguard our Premiership future, said Elsom, who has committed the club to the building of a brand new stadium in the city that is scheduled to open in August 2000.

Taylor said he was more frustrated than angry at Leicester's decision. The club are letting a good man go and I'll prove them wrong. Taylor previously enjoyed success in charge of the England Under-21 team and Gillingham, whom he steered to promotion from Division Two.

Ex-West Ham United manager Harry Redknapp, currently Director of Football with First Division Portsmouth, was immediately installed as favourite to succeed Taylor, with ex-Tottenham boss George Graham the second favourite. Both had the backing of the Leicester fans, but both ruled themselves out – Redknapp because he felt owed a debt of loyalty to Portsmouth; Graham because he had launched a legal action against Spurs, claiming unfair dismissal.

Meanwhile coach Gary Parker was asked to prepare the team for the League (Worthington) Cup tie at home to table-topping Leeds. Parker's team crashed to a humiliating 6-0 defeat, and less than 24 hours later Dave Bassett had been appointed as the new manager of Leicester, with Second Division Brighton's impressive young manager Micky Adams named as Bassett's number two and eventual successor.

The pair (who previously worked successfully together at Nottingham Forest) have their work cut out to turn around Leicester's fortunes. Bassett says it is up to each individual player to impress him, irrespective of reputation. His first task may be to persuade highly-rated Turkish international midfielder Muzzy Izzet to stay at Filbert Street. Izzet claims to be unhappy at the club and is believed to be the £8 million target of Aston Villa.

Over at Derby, the board decided it was time for veteran manager Jim Smith to step aside after six years in charge of the club. Much of that time had been successful: Smith got the club into the Premiership and established them at the top level on limited resources. But the last two seasons were difficult and the team has struggled again in the current campaign.

Smith brought in Colin Todd as his assistant last season and Todd helped the club avoid relegation. The ex-Middlesbrough and Bolton Wanderers manager – who won two League Championship medals with Derby in the 1970s as a classy defender – was immediately named boss of the Rams in succession to Smith.

Todd can be under no illusions about the size of the task now facing him: his first game in sole charge ended in a 5-2 defeat as Derby were swept aside by Fulham in the League Cup. Todd may also be under pressure to sell promising young players like Malcolm Christie, Chris Riggott and Seth Johnson to ease Derby's stretched financial situation.

Liverpool are reportedly lining up a bid for central defender Riggott, with Norwegian Vegard Heggem likely to be offered to Derby as part of the deal. Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier is keen to strengthen the Reds' defensive resources. His team was stunned by a goal in the last minute of extra-time against First Division Grimsby Town that saw Liverpool crash out of the League Cup – the first of the three trophies they won last season.

Meanwhile Liverpool's out-of-favour goalkeeper Sander Westerveld is desperate for a move from Anfield, even if only on loan. Dutch national boss Louis Van Gaal has said he will not pick Westerveld for Holland again until the keeper is playing regular first-team football.

Another player anxious for first-team football is Jason McAteer. The Republic of Ireland defender-cum-midfielder is not in Blackburn Rovers manager Graeme Souness's long-term plans, and has issued a 'come and get me' plea to Sunderland manager Peter Reid. McAteer believes Reid has the man-management skills to get the best out of the ex-Liverpool and Bolton player.

However, Reid is trying to persuade star striker Kevin Phillips to stay at the Stadium of Light. The prolific Phillips, who has scored 100 League goals for the Black Cats in just 147 games, is disillusioned at being overlooked for England by Sven Goran Eriksson. With the World Cup on the horizon, he believes his international prospects may only improve if he moves to a higher-profile club. Should he decide to move, there would be no shortage of offers for his goalscoring services, with Arsenal likely to head the queue despite the challenge of trying to keep their existing forwards happy.

The agent of Arsenal's Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp says he thinks the Gunners are trying to force his player out of Highbury. Manager Arsene Wenger persuaded Bergkamp to sign a new contract with Arsenal in the summer, but the player has only started three matches so far this season. There is intense competition to partner Thierry Henry up front between Bergkamp, Kanu, Sylvain Wiltord and Francis Jeffers. Bergkamp's claims for a starting place are weakened by his refusal to fly, which rules him out of Arsenal's away matches in the Champions League.

Another forward trying to advance his claims is Joe-Max Moore. The Everton striker is hoping his form for the United States will persuade club boss Walter Smith to give him another run in the Toffees' first eleven. Moore scored the two goals that take the USA into next summer's World Cup finals; but after a promising start to his Everton career he has struggled to command a place in the starting line-up. Fellow-strikers Kevin Campbell, Duncan Ferguson and Tomasz Radzinski are all above Moore in the Goodison pecking order.

Trevor Sinclair, the West Ham United midfielder, has handed in a written transfer request. He was included in the England squad for the first for the match against Greece, and believes he needs to move to a more successful club to force his way into World Cup contention. Sunderland and Leeds are believed to be interested.

Meanwhile, the threat of strike action by the players is looming over the game. The Professional Footballers Association (PFA), the players' trade union, is in dispute with the Premier League about the percentage of

increased TV revenues that is being channelled to it for funding players welfare schemes. The PFA is threatening to ballot its members about refusing to play in live televised matches unless the Premier League offers it a bigger cut of the TV money.

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