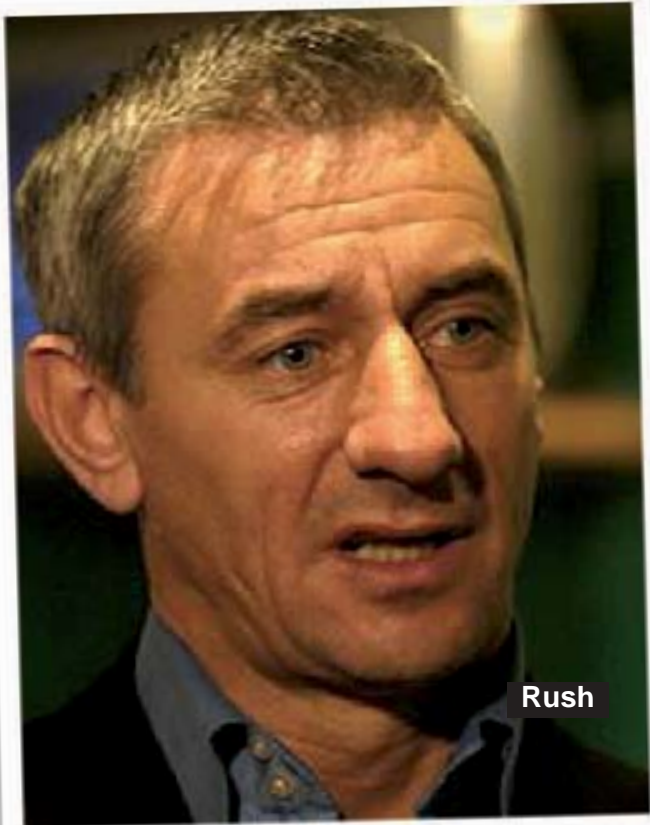


# Rush: Merseyside pride is just for starters



Rush

**S**ATURDAY'S derby marks the start of a massive week for the Reds, writes Ian Rush.

October may seem too early in the season to be talking about a critical run of games but the next three matches really are that important.

After dropping off the pace in the Premier League in recent weeks, Liverpool desperately need the three points as well as the pride at stake against Everton.

The focus will then switch to the Champions League and next Wednesday's clash with Besiktas. Losing to Marseille at home has made the trip to Turkey absolutely crucial and if we were to lose over there we would be struggling to qualify.

From there it's home to prepare for the showdown with Premier League leaders Arsenal at Anfield. After that game we will have a good idea of what this season will hold for Liverpool.

Rafa Benitez will hope all those

players involved in internationals tomorrow arrive back safe and fit.

It must have been a frustrating time for the manager since the 2-2 draw with Spurs. He hasn't been able to work on anything due to the international break and even when he gets all the players together on Thursday he can't do a lot.

A lot of them will have played two matches in the space of five days.

The fact that Saturday's match is a lunchtime kick off doesn't help and the focus will just be on making sure players are physically ready.

Earlier on in the season Liverpool were playing well and the international break came at a bad time. But I honestly think this latest break could prove to be a blessing in disguise.

Liverpool have struggled for form but the time off will have given everyone a chance to have a look at things.

The 3-0 defeat at Goodison last season really hurt and the Reds will

be desperate to make amends.

Steven Gerrard and Jamie Carragher will be reminding the other players about what happened that day.

The local lads have a key role to play helping prepare the new lads. They've got to know what to expect because there really is nothing quite like playing in a Merseyside derby.

It will be played at 100 miles an hour and whoever holds their nerve at vital moments will come out on top.

Mikel Arteta has been in great form but we've got players of our own who can cause them problems.

Gerrard usually rises to the occasion in games like this and hopefully Fernando Torres will win his fitness race. He would be a big loss because he works so hard for the team and you need that in derbies.

Apart from all else, it's my birthday on Saturday and three points would be a great present.

## Carra: Pako exit no excuse

**J**amie Carragher today insisted the departure of Pako Ayestaran from the Liverpool coaching staff is not the reason for the Reds' recent dip in form.

The Spaniard's exit from the club was confirmed at the weekend, although he will remain contracted at Anfield until the summer.

Ayestaran's departure has coincided with a disappointing series of results for Rafael Benitez's men, but Carragher is adamant the two events are not linked.

"Gerard Houllier had the same thing thrown at him when Patrice Bergues left, and in that case I do think that had a big impact," said Carragher.

"But the difference now is that Rafa Benitez is a coach, while Gerard Houllier was more of simply a manager and observed coaching rather than actually taking it.

"I got on great with Pako, he was superb at his job and he had a great relationship with the manager, but he was the fitness coach.

"Rafa is the coach. At the end of the day, we've lost a fitness coach, not a football coach, although it's a fitness coach who was outstanding at his job.

"But it's still the manager picking the team. Rafa is the football man and that hasn't changed, and I'm sure the results since Pako has left is just a coincidence.

"I can understand why people might look at that. People are always looking for reasons why a team isn't playing so well, but in the training sessions we are still doing the same things.

"If people do look at Pako leaving as the reason for our loss in form, I think they are looking for excuses really."



Carragher

## Henry ex fights for share of £25 million

By Victoria Newton

**T**HIERRY Henry's ex-wife Claire is due to face his lawyers in court today as she battles for a share of his £25million fortune.

The model will appear in person in London with her lawyers in the first round of her divorce battle with the ex-Arsenal captain.

Claire, 27, who has two-year-old daughter Tea with Thierry, is likely to claim the marriage broke down after she found texts from a make-up artist on his phone.

The Sun exclusively revealed yesterday how Thierry, 30, was apparently caught out by the raunchy messages from Sadie Hewlett.

Claire confronted Thierry —



and he walked out on the marriage and family home before announcing his £16million transfer to Barcelona.

Thierry will not be in court in person but will send his Mishcon De Reya legal team.

In September Claire was granted a quickie divorce on the grounds of Thierry's "unreasonable behaviour".

She is now demanding a £10million divorce settlement. The couple also face a battle over access to little Tea.

Claire has hired Prince Charles's divorce lawyer Fiona Shackleton to handle her case. Shackleton is currently representing Paul McCartney in his divorce battle with Heather Mills.