

## SANTOS

### Fish are accused of piracy

Santos had no time to enjoy its success.

Sparked by teenage stars Robinho and Diego, Santos dazzled Brazilian fans with its exciting play that evoked memories of the great Pele-led Santos teams of the 1960s.

But within days of winning its first national championship, talk began that the Peixe ("The Fish") would be broken up.

Santos was forced to issue a statement that Diego and Robinho weren't for sale.

"Robinho and Diego have just completed the first years of five-year contracts," club spokesman Aldo Neto told Reuters. "You can say they are not for sale."

Santos needs Diego and Robinho for the long season ahead. In January, it began play in the Paulista championship — the Sao Paulo regional championship. And it's entered in the Libertadores Cup, the South American championship, for the first time in 18 years.

Santos wasn't simply a two-player team, however. Its flowing style depended on skill players at each position. Others who stood out included the outside backs Michel and Leo, who has been described as the best left back Brazil has produced since Roberto Carlos. In midfield, Paulo Almeida has drawn comparisons to Gilberto Silva, the revelation of the Brazilian midfield at the 2002 World Cup. Renato and Elano also supported Diego in midfield, and Alberto completed Robinho in attack.

Santos, which also will compete in the Copa Brasil and national championship later in the year, lost three players this winter:

**Teenage sensation Robinho (left) says he's working on new moves to counter the tough marking he'll face in 2003.**

defender Maurinho (Atletico Mineiro), midfielder Robert (offer from Japanese club Consadole Sapporo) and Alberto (Dynamo Moscow).

Santos coach Emerson Leao was furious that the club signed only one player over the break: striker Ricardo Oliveira. To make matters worse, Portuguesa, Oliveira's former team, was trying to block his move, accusing Santos of piracy.

Santos signed Oliveira after he won a court order allowing him to leave Portuguesa, which has been relegated to the Second Division and had not been paying its players on time. Portuguesa countered that it had paid Oliveira in full and won an injunction of its own to block the striker's move.

That didn't prevent Santos from presenting Oliveira in a No. 9 jersey at a press conference.

"They're pirates who have stolen our player," Portuguesa vice president Jeronimo Gomes said of Santos.

Primary attention will be on Robinho, Oliveira's partner up front.

Commentators were still talking about Robinho's performance in the 2002 national championship playoffs weeks after the fact: "A top-line player, a genius, a rare precious stone who, without exaggerating, reminds us of the King [Pele]," according to one *Lance* columnist.

Robinho's move to draw a penalty in the second leg of the national championship final against Corinthians — he faked his defender seven times before breaking into the area — "was a move that will go down in history," added another *Lance* columnist.

Robinho, 18, says he's too busy coming up with new moves to think about moving abroad.

"I've been practicing new dribbles for the Paulista," he said. "The marking is going to be much tougher, and I've got to innovate."



PAULO WHITAKER/REUTERS