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HEADACHE: Everton FC manager Rafa Benitez is preparing his team for the pre-season Florida Cup tournament. AFP Photo.

### **Paul Kennedy**

I saw photographs this week of Everton manager Rafa Benitez (that still feels weird to write) arriving in Florida for his team's pre-season tournament where they will play Millonarios FC of Colombia.

Arsenal and Inter Milan both dropped out of the mini-competition.

Rafa, responsible as ever, was wearing a facemask as he led his team off the aeroplane following their arrival in the US.

As a result, I couldn't see if he was smiling for the cameras. Maybe behind the mask he was,

but we'll never know.

What we do know, is before a competitive ball has even been kicked with him as manager, Rafa is already facing problems the likes of which he has never faced before.

Yes, he will take time to settle because of his previous successful spell with Everton's arch-rivals, Liverpool, and he sure does need to win the backing of the Goodison faithful, but Rafa's problems right now are far bigger than that.

Earlier this week it was reported that a 31-year-old, married, Premier League footballer had been arrested on suspicion of child sex offences.

Revealing this particular player's identity is against the law in the UK, although there's nothing stopping me doing so in the pages of this newspaper. I've just chosen not to do so.

What I can say is he plays for Everton FC, hence Rafa's ever-increasing headache.

The club put out a statement on Monday that read: "Everton can confirm it has suspended a First-Team player pending a police investigation. The Club will continue to support the authorities with their inquiries and will not be making any further statement at this time."

This, unfortunately, led to a number of internet warriors putting two and two together and coming up with the wrong player, incorrectly labelling Fabien Delph as the guilty party.

He is 31, the same age as the player arrested and plays for Everton, but other than that, has nothing whatsoever to do with this criminal investigation.

So maybe Everton shot themselves in the foot with their hastily released statement.

If, in the weeks and months that follow, the player in question is charged, brought before the courts, and convicted, then he deserves everything he gets, and more.

I've no doubt, if convicted, the player will be looking at a custodial sentence, and will probably never play professional football again.

Right now, Everton have done the right thing by suspending him pending the outcome of the criminal investigation, although maybe in hindsight, they'd have been better saying nothing in public which would have certainly stopped fingers pointing at Delph.

In this digital age we live in, where sadly many people choose to believe everything they read on social media sites without checking the facts, choosing not to name the person arrested in a newspaper for legal reasons is about as useful as an ashtray on a motorbike.

I just hope, if the case does get to court, some well-paid lawyer doesn't try to 'get his client off' on a technicality because of the social media storm that followed his arrest.

If that happens, justice will not have been served.

As for Benitez, I believe he is professional enough to focus on the upcoming season and let football do the talking.

Source: *VNN*