

Larsson receives royal honour

AFP, Barcelona

Veteran Swedish international striker Henrik Larsson received the Member of the British Empire awarded to him by Queen Elizabeth II in the New Year Day's Honours List here on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old -- a rare non-Briton to receive awards from the Queen -- was awarded the MBE for his outstanding performances for Scottish giants Celtic with whom he scored 242 goals over seven seasons before leaving for Barcelona two years ago.

Larsson, who leaves Barca for Helsingborg at the end of the season, received the award at the Nou Camp stadium from British ambassador Stephen Wright and admitted to being "very honoured".

Larsson said he was especially touched that representatives from Celtic, who had nominated him for the award, had travelled over to be at the ceremony.

"This is both recognition for me but it is also one for my teammates," said Larsson.

Scholl extends Bayern contract

AFP, Munich

Veteran former German international midfielder Mehmet Scholl extended his contract with German champions Bayern Munich for a year on Tuesday.

The 35-year-old, who has been at the club since leaving Karlsruhe in 1992, will also take up unspecified duties with the club at the end of his playing career.

Scholl, capped 36 times but ruled out of a return to the German squad for the World Cup by coach Jurgen Klinsmann, became the first player to win the domestic title eight times when Bayern sealed the crown last Saturday.

Sanz considers Real return

REUTERS, Madrid

Former Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz is considering standing in the club's presidential election which is due to be held after the end of the Primera Liga season.

"I am looking to see how much support I have, that will determine whether I stand or not," Sanz said in sports daily AS on Wednesday.

"I will ask the members if they want to continue with the club model that has been such a failure, or whether they want a change of direction."

Real have not won a major trophy for the last three seasons, their worst run in more than 50 years.

Under Sanz Real won two European Cups in three years so it was a great surprise when he lost the 2000 election, after the second of those victories, to Florentino Perez.

Sanz stood against Perez's reelection in 2004 and suffered a crushing defeat. Perez quit at the end of February to be replaced by Fernando Martin, who was in turn ousted by the board in favour of elections last month.

Sanz added: "Martin was kicked out because he didn't do what Florentino wanted. I don't think Florentino will stand again, but I have heard that he would get involved if he thought I was ahead in the polls."

"Perhaps he is worried that I might lift the lid on what has been happening."

Other candidates expected to stand in the election include double world rally champion Carlos Sainz, defeated 2004 candidate Arturo Baldasano and dissident director Ramon Calderon.

The result of the election is expected to be known at the beginning of July.

Langer trashes retirement talk

PTI, Melbourne

A day after his purported retirement plans were widely reported by the media, Justin Langer said he had no intentions yet of hanging his boots as he had not lost his motivation to keep playing.

"I am not thinking about retiring and I have never said I am thinking about retiring after the Ashes," the Australian opener said.

"What I have said for the past few years is that you reassess things after every Test series. The reality is that at the age of 35 this issue of retirement will keep coming up," Langer was quoted as saying in "The Age".

"Who I am to say I will play the whole series anyway because I have to keep training hard and playing well to stay in the team," he said.

Langer, in fact, said lack of international cricket over the next two years might actually give him an opportunity to extend his Test career into its 16th year.



Iran's Mohammad Nosrati (R) vies with Swiss SV Lyss players Hakan Bucak (C) and Michael Quartey during their friendly match in Lyss near Bern on Tuesday.

Inter seek Cup solace

REUTERS, Milan

Inter Milan head into the Italian Cup final second leg against AS Roma on Thursday as slight favourites although even winning the trophy will do little to compensate for another disappointing season.

The first leg in Rome was 1-1 so a goalless draw at the San Siro would be enough to give Inter a second straight triumph in the much-maligned competition after they beat Roma last year.

In Serie A, though, Inter have failed yet again to make a serious bid to challenge AC Milan and Juventus and it is now 17 years since they got their hands on the 'scudetto'. They are in third place 13 points behind Juve and 10 adrift of Milan.

Last season's Italian Cup win

was seen as the start of a new era under coach Roberto Mancini but Inter have not made the progress their fans hoped and a triumph on Thursday is unlikely to be greeted by much celebration.

Roma, on the other hand, would see a victory as confirmation that coach Luciano Spalletti has succeeded in getting the club back on track despite a consistently long injury list.

Spalletti has injected some steel and discipline into the side from the capital, who have enjoyed an excellent second half to the league campaign even without their injured captain and creative inspiration Francesco Totti.

Roma still have a chance of taking fourth place in Serie A, which brings a place in the Champions League qualifying round, but must beat second-placed Milan at the San Siro on Sunday and hope Fiorentina fail to win their final match

at Chievo. Few teams bother to compete seriously for the Italian Cup and the top clubs have fielded weakened sides this season as it moves towards becoming an unofficial reserve competition.

The best available teams will be selected to play in the final although the Rome club are still without Totti and Inter have an injury doubt over Brazilian forward Adriano while Colombian defender Ivan Cordoba is suspended.

Argentine midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron is set to return from injury for Inter along with Serbian Dejan Stankovic while Veron's compatriot Santiago Solari may be on the left flank. Roma are hoping Romanian defender Cristian Chivu will be fit.

"The game is open and we will fight until the end. We know the importance of this game," said Chivu.

Ajax sack Blind

REUTERS, Amsterdam

Ajax Amsterdam sacked coach Danny Blind on Wednesday, 13 months after he took over from Ronald Koeman.

A statement from the Dutch club on Wednesday said that the technical staff had failed to reach their objectives after a disappointing league campaign.

"The first team failed to get involved in the battle for the championship, our main objective," a club statement said.

"They also didn't perform like we wished, playing offensive, attractive and dominating football."

Blind, who was captain when Ajax won the 1995 Champions League, succeeded Koeman in April 2005 after a 13-year spell as player and several coaching positions.

Last season Blind guided Ajax to second place in the league and Champions League qualification, while they also won the Dutch Super Cup in August.

This season Ajax finished fourth, 24 points behind champions PSV Eindhoven, although they qualified for the Champions League third qualifying round after winning the playoffs.

They did end the season on a high, however, beating PSV 2-1 in the Dutch Cup final.

Blind's future looked in doubt in April when he failed to get the support of the club's management and board.

According to media reports Henk ten Cate, the assistant to Frank Rijkaard at Barcelona, is favourite to take over at Ajax.

Spurs demand replay

AP, London

Tottenham asked to replay its season-ending loss in the Premier League because 10 of its players were sick with suspected food poisoning.

Sunday's 2-1 defeat at West Ham allowed Arsenal to overtake Tottenham for fourth place with a 4-2 win over Wigan and clinch a place in the Champions League qualifying rounds.

The Premier League said Tuesday the Tottenham-West Ham result will stand, but its board will meet to discuss the matter Wednesday.

The players fell ill with vomiting and diarrhoea hours before the game and the club asked Premier League officials for a postponement shortly before kick-off. The league would sanction only a four-hour delay and the game went ahead on time with several players clearly sick.

Faced with a place in the less prestigious UEFA Cup rather than the more lucrative Champions League, Tottenham chairman Daniel Levy wrote an open letter to the Premier League to ask for a replay.

"Sunday could have been a momentous day for our club and our fans," Levy said. "Our match at West Ham was effectively a cup final."

"What puzzles us is why the (Premier League) were prepared to sanction a four-hour delay but not a 24-hour delay. If the integrity of all matches kicking off at the same time was your primary concern, why sanction a delay of any kind?"

Roeder cleared for Magpies job

AFP, London

The English Premier League has cleared the way for Newcastle to appoint Glenn Roeder as their new manager despite his lack of coaching qualifications.

The club's former defender has been caretaker manager since Graeme Souness lost his job and has proved he has what it takes to fill the role after taking 32 points from the 15 league games for which he was in charge.

But his full-time appointment was thrown into doubt when the Premier League insisted that, as has yet to obtain the required FIFA Pro-Licence to manage in the Premiership, they would need permission from their top-flight clubs if Newcastle wanted to consider him as a candidate for the vacant post.

That has been achieved and the clearance will be ratified at the Premier League's AGM at the beginning of June.

Newcastle chairman Freddy Shepherd told www.nfc.co.uk: "Should we wish to appoint Glenn Roeder as our next manager it is nice to know we have the support of fellow clubs, and I'd like to thank them and the Premier League for their understanding."

"Contrary to inaccurate newspaper reports that appeared last week saying the situation was in danger of turning into a farce, or was heading for disarray, the whole process has been handled very professionally -- and amicably -- from start to finish."

Kahn to carry on

Football

AFP, Munich

German international goalkeeper Oliver Kahn said Wednesday it was by no means certain that he would quit the national team after next month's World Cup finals in his homeland.

Kahn turns 37 during the finals, running from June 9 until July 9, but rather than thinking of retirement, the Bayern Munich man believes he can follow in the footsteps of Italian goalkeeper Dino Zoff and play on until he is 40.

"Most people probably expect me to stop at 37 but I am not thinking about that at the moment," Kahn said in magazine SportBild.

"Why should I quit if I am in good shape and I am still highly motivated?"

"Three years ago when things

were not going so well I seriously thought about retiring.

"But who knows perhaps I will



OLIVER KAHN

have a surge in form. Anything is possible and as I said I could still be in goal at 40."

Goalkeeping legend Dino Zoff

won the 1982 World Cup with Italy at the age of 40 and is Kahn's inspiration.

"Dino Zoff was a World Cup winner at 40 and as long as I spend more time on the training ground than at the doctors I am confident of carrying on," added Kahn.

Kahn, capped 84 times by his country, is second choice behind Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann heading into the finals and Bayern chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge believes he will call it a day after the World Cup.

"After the World Cup he will quit the national team and concentrate on trying to win more trophies with Bayern," Rummenigge said in an interview with Bild daily.

Kahn is contracted at Bayern until 2008 when he is expected to make way for promising German Under-21 goalkeeper Michael Rensing.

United's testimony to Keane

Football

AFP, Manchester

Roy Keane's iconic status among Manchester United fans despite his rancorous departure late last year was confirmed here on Tuesday as 69,951 fans turned out for his testimonial match between the Red Devils and his present team Celtic.

The Republic of Ireland legend attracted a crowd which was even larger than the one that trooped in to support Ryan Giggs' testimonial five years ago and saw Keane play on both sides.

Keane, who along with Lou Macari and Brian McClair is the third player to play for both clubs and to be honoured in such a way by both of them, even set up the winner for United in the second-half.

His brilliant through ball found Portuguese star Ronaldo and he slotted the ball past Artur Boruc for the only goal of the game.

Keane, who was accorded a joint Celtic and United guard of honour onto the pitch with his five children, played throughout the match with the chants of "There's only one Keano".

The match ended with all the United and Celtic players and even manager Sir Alex Ferguson, whose falling out with Keane provoked his departure last November, in the centre circle at the end to pay final tribute to the extraordinary Irishman, who dominated the club for 12 years.

As usual he was to the point at the end, limiting himself to a few words.

"That's it really, I'll remember this for the rest of my life. All the best."



Roy Keane with his daughter prior to the kick-off of his testimonial match between Manchester United and Celtic at Old Trafford on Tuesday.

Ruud booted by Fergie

Football

AFP, Manchester

Ruud van Nistelrooy said it was "painful" for him to be missing former Manchester United teammate Roy Keane's testimonial at Old Trafford on Tuesday after reports suggested the Dutch striker had been booted out of Old Trafford by manager Sir Alex Ferguson.

"Speaking at the Netherlands' World Cup training camp, just outside Eindhoven, van Nistelrooy said: "It's good to get my mind off it especially as I can't be there tonight. For me it's painful. I wanted to respect Roy, I wasn't allowed to really. It was painful, that was the most painful thing."

"I spoke to him (Keane) as well and it should be fine," van Nistelrooy also told Sky Sports on Tuesday.

Van Nistelrooy, 29, the scorer of 150 goals in 200 starts for United

since joining in a 19-million-pound transfer from PSV Eindhoven five years ago, left Old Trafford before United's 4-0 victory over Charlton on Sunday after discovering he'd been left out of the team and his place taken by teenager Giuseppe Rossi.

Initial reports of van Nistelrooy's walk out appeared to indicate that the Dutch international had made the decision himself.

However, Tuesday's Manchester Evening News said that the training ground rows last week between Ferguson and van Nistelrooy were so serious that the United boss ordered the striker to go home.

Van Nistelrooy, according to the MEN, told friends he didn't walk out on his teammates but was ordered to leave by his furious boss who said: "You're not welcome here."

The forward was, the paper reported, sent packing after being told in United's hotel that he wasn't in the squad for the final Premiership match of the season.

However the MEN, quoting sources in the Netherlands "close to the van Nistelrooy camp" said the player was mystified that if events at United's Carrington training ground were so harmful, why was he even taken to the club's pre-match hotel?

Ferguson is also believed to have told van Nistelrooy that he wasn't welcome at Keane's testimonial farewell at Old Trafford on Tuesday against Celtic.

Talks between Ferguson and United chief executive David Gill are ongoing and the Dutchman's future remains uncertain with any decision having to be ratified by the Glazer family, United's US-based owners.

There have been reports linking van Nistelrooy with a move to Atletico Madrid and Spanish international striker Fernando Torres moving in the other direction, though, United would have to stump up some 21 million pounds.

Giles eyes June return

Cricket

AFP, London

England spinner Ashley Giles hopes to return to cricket next month and put his injury misery behind him.

Hip and hernia problems have dogged the Warwickshire left-arter, a key member of England's Ashes-winning side last year, in recent times and he has ruled himself out of the three-Test series starting against Sri Lanka at Lord's on Thursday.

But he hopes to be ready for the first Test against Pakistan, the second team touring England this year, which starts at Lord's on July 13.

"We think we have got to the bottom of my problems. It seems to be a dodgy groin," Giles told a reception at the Houses of Parliament on Tuesday to officially launch this summer's international cricket programme.

The 33-year-old said his injury

has been diagnosed as "a Gilmour groin -- a type of hernia."

He added: "I've had the hip problem and the hip problem is still there. Which came first -- the groin or the hip?"

"One could have had an effect on the other. But hopefully we've got to the bottom of it and hopefully in five weeks I can start playing cricket."

Looking ahead to the Sri Lanka series, Giles said: "Over here you are looking to dominate with your quick bowlers."

"Sri Lanka are not used to playing the ball at chest height, particularly against somebody quick like Andrew Flintoff."

But he warned that star Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran would be a threat in all conditions.

"Murali's going to be a handful. It might be his last trip to England. We all love to see him bowl and hope he has a relative amount of success -- but that England win three-nil."

Harmison's comeback delayed

BBC ONLINE, undated

England pace bowler Steve Harmison's comeback has been postponed after his wife went into labour.

Harmison had been due to play for Durham on Wednesday in their home county championship game against Middlesex.

Harmison is hoping to prove his fitness ahead of the second Test against Sri Lanka, which starts on May 25.

But he could still have two more chances to do so before the squad is announced as Durham have a C&G Trophy tie against Lancashire next Sunday and a championship fixture against Notts at Trent Bridge on the May 17.

Harmison and his wife already have two daughters and he has suffered from homesickness on past England tours because of the time spent away from his family.

In a newspaper interview last year, he said: "I cannot see myself playing for England when I am in my mid-thirties."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	43 "Hum- bug!"	2 Salan's field	25 Eurasian mountain range
1 Plead	44 Part	3 Mentor	26 Big wind-storm
4 Distant	45 Loop	5 Enthusiastic	27 Poor-box donation
7 Pop-singer	46 Trousers	6 Clinic	28 Colt or filly
Stone	50 Leeway	7 "Lost in Space"	29 Gilligan's home
11 Egg	53 Plaything	8 Lennon's lady	30 Radiate
13 Candle count	55 Castle	9 Bro's counter-part	31 Knock
14 Monad	56 A	10 Pigs' digs	35 Pen point
15 Address	Great Lake	11 Pigs' dig limit	38 X rating?
16 Play-	57 Keatsian opus	12 FOR charity	40 Upper limit
17 Inquisitive	58 Melody	13 Cudgel	42 Helicopter feature
18 Book-jacket	59 Guys' cohorts	14 Jewel on Broadway	45 Protuberance
19 Para-graph	60 Legal matter	15 Kitten's call	47 Common object, maybe
20 Type of part	61 Fresh	16 Ethical	48 Sound quality
24 Caspian caviar	1 Flop	17 Norway's capital	49 Distort
28 Warrior	2 Ethical	18 Pale	50 Rule (Abbr.)
32 Ballroom	3 Ethical	19 Tranquil	51 Man-mouse link
33 Norway's capital	4 Ethical	20 Soaring	52 Lubricant
34 Pale	5 Ethical	21 Preserves in brine	54 Undeniable
36 Tranquil	6 Ethical	22 More lascivious	
37 Soaring	7 Ethical		
39 Preserves in brine	8 Ethical		
41 More lascivious	9 Ethical		

Solution time: 24 mins.

ACROSS	43 Humbug!	2 Salan's field	25 Eurasian mountain range
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