

Sport

White House dinner beckons Keller

MADRID, Feb 12 (Reuters/Internet): Rayo Vallecano's American goalkeeper Kasey Keller has been invited to a White House dinner with the king and queen of Spain, Marica reported on Saturday.

Keller, in exceptional form for the Madrid club since signing from Leicester City in the close season, will join the Spanish royals at dinner on February 23.

"This is a great honour for me," Keller was quoted as saying by Marca. "To tell the truth, at first I thought it was a joke but now I realise it's not I'm very happy."

"It's not every day you get the chance to have dinner at the White House."

Keller has been given permission by the club to attend the function, which is conveniently taking place on a free Wednesday for Rayo, ninth in the Spanish first division.

WC 2006 CAF undecided about support

LAGOS, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): The Confederation of African Football (CAF) will support one of Africa's two bids for the 2006 World Cup finals after FIFA inspection visits to Morocco and South Africa.

CAF general secretary Mustapha Fakhry said on Saturday that his organisation would make its decision after studying the inspection reports, but would not tell the other candidate to withdraw.

CAF has consistently promised to pronounce themselves in favour of one of the two African bids — the others are Brazil, England and Germany — but has delayed an announcement despite pressure from both Morocco and South Africa.

"We don't understand why everyone wants us to proclaim in favour of one of the two candidates when no one is making a fuss about their being two European countries bidding for 2006," Fakhry said.

"But maybe, and I underline the word maybe, it's important for us to make a stand and we'll wait to study the reports from the inspection trips before taking a decision."

Even then, we could never tell a sovereign country to withdraw from the race. We have asked both countries before to stand down in favour of the other but if they both want to continue, that's their right."

Both Morocco and South Africa are due to receive inspection visits from FIFA next month but any endorsement from CAF would not be forthcoming until June, when their executive committee next meets.

That would be less than a month before the FIFA executive committee votes to decide the destiny of the 2006 World Cup in Zurich on July 6.

Last month, CAF president Issa Hayatou admitted he was in a quandary over the need for the African soccer authority to endorse one of the candidates.

"But what must I do?" he asked a media conference in Accra before the start of the African Nations Cup finals. "You tell me, maybe you've got the solution."

Fish ends international career

ACCRA, Feb 13: Mark Fish announced his retirement from international football on Saturday, citing distaste for the South African federation as the reason for his decision, reports Reuters.

The 25-year-old defender, who plays for Bolton in the English first division and has 58 caps, told Reuters: "I don't like the way the federation treat the coaching staff, or run football in South Africa."

"The people that run South African football should not be there," Fish said he had asked coach Trevor Moloto to play him in the African Nations Cup third-place play-off against Tunisia, won 2-1 by South Africa, as he had an injured toe.

That means that Thursday's 2-0 semifinal defeat by Nigeria was his last game for the Bafana Bafana.

Fish said the decision to quit was a difficult one.

"All the European-based players love playing for our country, but a footballer's career is a short one."

"In the end we all have to look after ourselves first." Fish said the time he had spent apart from his family had been a nightmare.

"I am a professional and can adapt to the change in climate for African football, but I spend a lot of time away from my wife and little one," he added.

As for Thursday's defeat he said: "You can't concede a goal after 40 seconds to that class of opposition and expect to get away with it, but we have never had to qualify for this tournament before and that was a major achievement."

"I sat down man-to-man with Trevor Moloto, and told him I feel it is in my best interest to just worry about my club career."

"Making this announcement now means I won't play in South Africa's July tour," he said. "If I don't have an off-season this summer, I won't have had a rest for three years."

European football scene

UNDATED, Feb 13 (Reuters/AP): AC Milan went second in the Serie A. Real Madrid scraped through in the Primera Liga. Olympique Marseille were shown the door in the French Cup, while in the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich recorded a comfortable win during Saturday's action in Europe.

SERIE A
ROME: AC Milan moved second after surviving a Bologna

Struggling Verona picked up a useful point with a 1-1 draw at Bari.

New signing Domenico Morfeo gave Verona the lead in the 39th minute but Rachid Nekrouz equalised five minutes later.

PRIMERA LIGA
MADRID: Argentine forward Rolando Zarate saved the day once again for Real Madrid by scoring a 75th-minute goal in a

the team's 1-0 victory over lowly Merida in the Copa del Rey quarterfinal first leg.

Elsewhere Saturday, Valladolid held Valencia to a 0-0 draw at home. Valencia stay with 33 points and Valladolid with 28.

In Bilbao, Diego Tristán had moments of glory and others of misery. He scored first to put Mallorca ahead in the 23rd minute but then equalised for

minutes from veteran Senegalese striker Amara Traore paved the way for Gueugnon's second round victory.

The score was 2-0 in the start was the ideal scenario. Maybe in the end Gueugnon were simply too good for Marseille," Traore said.

Marseille, who are having a disastrous season, were already out of the League Cup and they are closer in the standings to the relegation zone than a European qualifying place.

They are at home to their biggest rivals Paris St Germain, 2-0 winners at Fifth Division Beaulieu-Dames, in the First Division on Tuesday.

"I'm angry and a bit discouraged. We must react against PSG," Casani said.

Marseille can take some heart from their fightback in the final half hour when they were four goals down.

Former PSG striker Florian Maurice, making his first appearance for more than a month after injury, and Cyrille Pougé pulled back two quick goals. Defender Yannick Fischer added a third from a corner in injury time.

But Casani said: "Success goes to those who are more daring. It's not 20 minutes from the end of the match that we should wake up."

Marseille were one of three First Division sides eliminated in the second round.

St Etienne, who have won the trophy six times, lost at home to second division Lorient 4-3 on penalties following a 0-0 draw on Friday.

Le Havre went down 1-0 away to third division Red Star who have won the trophy five times — four in the 1920s.

Metz survived a scare at fourth division St Quentin, snatching an equaliser in the dying seconds of injury time before winning 3-1 after extra time.

Olympique Lyon, who have won the French Cup three times, beat Troyes 1-0 at home in the only First Division tie of the second round.

France winger Tony Vairelles scored the only goal in the 22nd minute, volleying home a cross from the right by defender David Linares.

First Division leaders Monaco won 2-1 away to Third Division Thoirs while defending league champions Girondins Bordeaux crushed Fourth Division Porto-Vecchio 4-1 in Corsica with two goals from substitute Christophe Dugarry.

Holders Nantes routed Sixth Division amateurs Montcaules-Mines 6-0.

BUNDESLIGA

MUNICH: League-leading Bayern Munich became the first team in more than two years to beat Unterhaching at home, snapping their tiny neighbour's unbeaten home streak at 25 matches with a 2-0 victory. Paulo Sergio and Mehmet Scholl scored for the winners.

No 2 Leverkusen edged VfB Stuttgart 1-0 on Paulo Rink's 72-minute goal. Borussia Dortmund were held to a 1-1 draw by SSV Ulm at home as new coach Bernd Krauss was booed after just two weeks on the job. Other scores Saturday: Hansa Rostock 1, VfL Wolfsburg 1, MSV Duisburg 2, Eintracht Frankfurt 3.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

DUNDEE: Celtic moved to within seven points of leaders Rangers with a 3-0 victory at Dundee. In other Scottish Premier League results, Motherwell won 2-0 at Kilmarnock. St Johnstone's match with Hibernian was called off at halftime because of snow with the game tied 0-0.

1,000 Bundesliga appearances for Rehhagel

BERLIN, Feb 13 (Reuters/Internet): Kaiserslautern coach Otto Rehhagel, who made history this weekend with his 1,000th Bundesliga match, said he had enjoyed every bit of his prolific career and had no plans to retire.

"Everything was great, not only the happy times," Rehhagel said after his men's 2-1 victory over Arminia Bielefeld on Friday earned him a line in the record books.

"I want to be around for as long as possible," the 57-year-old Rehhagel, whose 1,000 appearances include his matches both as player and coach, told German television.

"I want to keep working with young people," added Rehhagel, who is proud not to have a single grey hair.

Rehhagel played 201 Bundesliga matches for Hertha Berlin and Kaiserslautern from 1963 to 1972 but his best moments came as a trainer.

He lifted Werder Bremen from nowhere to the top of European soccer, helping them to two German titles and victory in the 1992 Cup Winners' Cup.

After a frustrating spell with Bayern Munich, he re-joined Kaiserslautern, making them the first club to win the Bundesliga title straight after being promoted to the first division, in 1998.

"That was really great," he said. "It had never been done before."

There are other things he must be less happy about. He was the Borussia Dortmund coach when they suffered the worst defeat in Bundesliga history, a 12-0 thrashing by Borussia Moenchengladbach in 1978.

Among those to congratulate Rehhagel after Friday's match was Kaiserslautern chairman Juergen Friedrich, who played alongside him.

"He was always reliable as a player and he stayed that way as a coach," Friedrich said. "He is a flawless sportsman."

Premiership

MU brought down to earth



LONDON, Feb 13: England captain Alan Shearer scored twice as champions Manchester United were destroyed 3-0 by Newcastle on Saturday to halve their lead at the top of the Premier League to three points, reports Reuters.

United, who had captain Roy Keane sent off in the second half, top the table with 53 points from 24 matches.

Leeds United, in second place, made the most of the leaders' slip-up, beating Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 in a high-tenacious encounter at Elland Road.

A moment of brilliance from Australian striker Harry Kewell midway through the first half settled matters in a match which deteriorated into an ill-tempered affair.

Leeds, on 50 points from 24 matches, play host to Manchester United next weekend. Third-placed Arsenal host fourth-placed Liverpool today. Both teams are on 44 points.

At St James's Park, Duncan Ferguson's spectacular 26th minute volley sent Newcastle on the way to victory against a United side which never recovered from Keane's sending-off for two yellow cards just after the hour.

Shearer made it 2-0 with a curled shot in the 76th minute and slotted in the third four minutes from time.

United's players looked in-

creasingly rattled as the match wore on. Former Newcastle striker Andy Cole and defender Jaap Stam were booked for dissent and Paul Scholes went in the book for a foul.

"There was a lot of bad decisions against us and in these situations players are playing for big prizes," United manager Alex Ferguson said afterwards.

"But dissent is never acceptable... the players know that."

"The (sending off) made it very difficult for us. We had to try and rescue... we had to try and get back in. But it did put a strain on us."

Newcastle's Shearer and Ferguson have now scored 10 goals between them in 16 matches and Shearer said: "Today was a great result for us. It was a relief to get back in. We had a lot of pressure on us and United didn't like that."

"Duncan's goal was fantastic. He is a tremendous player and has taken a lot of the weight off my shoulders. I am sure we will score a lot more goals together."

Relegation battlers Bradford City blew a golden chance of getting three points when they let a 4-2 lead slip to lose 5-4 at West Ham.

Bradford snatched the lead through Dean Windass on the half hour, but the hosts levelled five minutes later when Trevor Sinclair lashed home an unstoppable shot.

The Hammers took the lead just before halftime when Paolo Di Canio took a free-kick near the corner flag, found John

Moncur 30 metres out and he slammed the ball past keeper Aiden Davison. Moncur turned within seconds later when he brought Dean Saunders down in the box and Peter Beagrie made it 2-2 from the spot.

The second half saw Bradford pull ahead early on with a two goals from Jamie Lawrence but Di Canio netted a penalty to pull one back for 4-3. Young England hopeful Joe Cole scored his first league goal for 4-4 and Frank Lampard hit the Hammers' winner seven minutes from time.

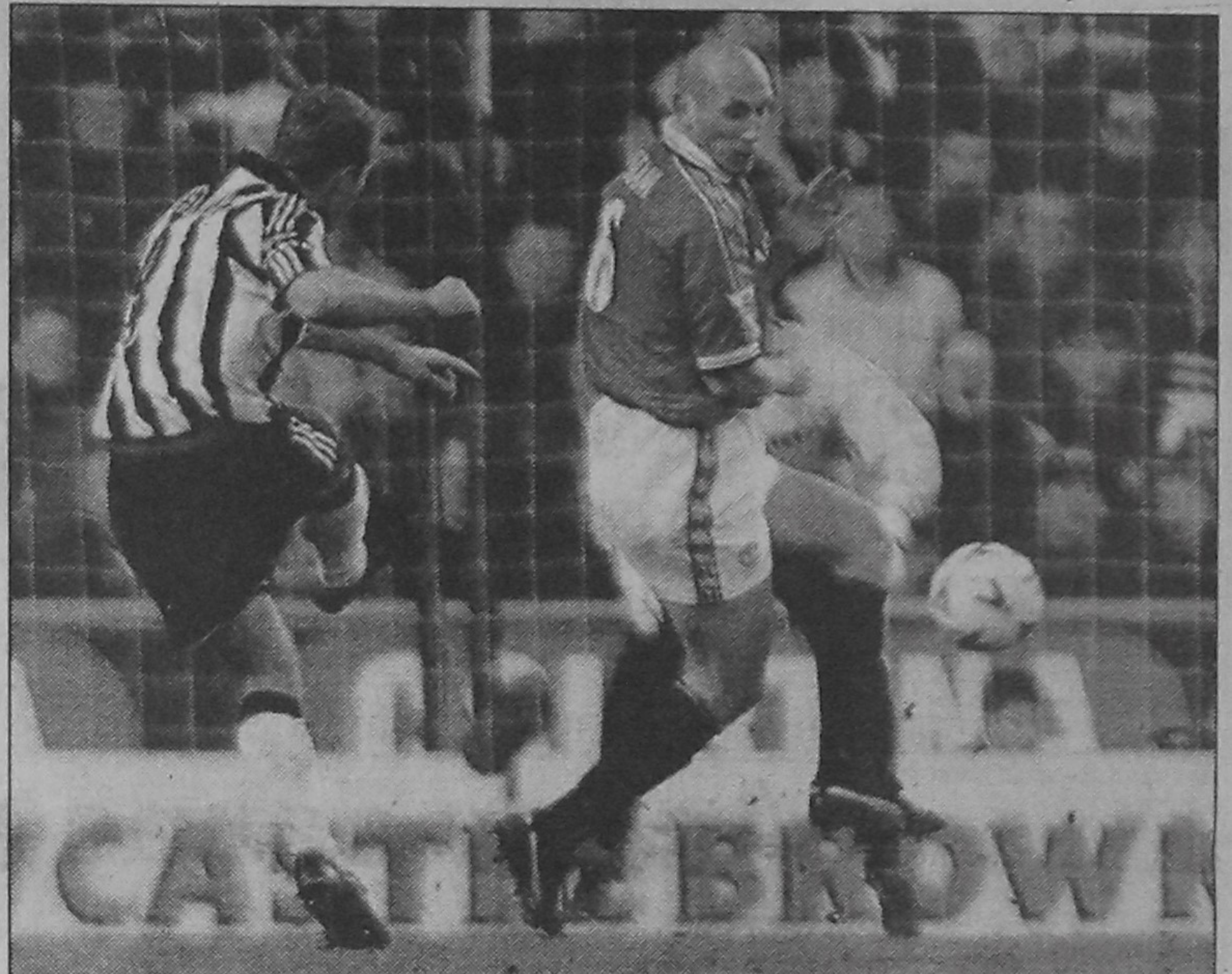
"That's what it is all about," West Ham manager Harry Redknapp smiled. "The fans certainly got their money's worth today."

Fifth-placed Chelsea came from behind to beat Wimbledon 3-1 at Stamford Bridge, extending their unbeaten run to 11 games. Goals from Gustavo Poyet, George Weah and Jody Morris cancelled out debutant Norwegian striker Andreas Lund's opener.

Coventry almost let Sunderland back into their match after winning 3-0 after 18 minutes, before they sealed victory 3-2, and Glenn Hoddle's Southampton beat Sheffield Wednesday 1-0 away.

Stan Collymore made his debut for Leicester as they drew 1-1 with bottom-of-the-league Watford and Everton moved up to seventh with a 1-0 win over Derby.

At the bottom Watford have 15 points, Wednesday 17, and Bradford and Derby 24.



Newcastle United ace Alan Shearer shoots past Manchester United's Dutch international Jaap Stam during their Premiership clash at St. James Park on February 12.

— Internet photo

Ugly side of Premiership



LONDON, Feb 13: Dissent, ill-tempered clashes and bookings littered the top matches in the English Premier League on Saturday as tension began to toll on the title challengers, reports Reuters.

Manchester United's 3-0 defeat at Newcastle saw the champions finish the match with 10 men and four others went in the referee's book while Leeds United's 1-0 victory over Tottenham was peppered with eight yellow cards.

More money and higher stakes have left referees struggling to keep control as players all too often run amok on the biggest stages.

Manchester United had skipper Roy Keane sent off for two yellow cards and Andy Cole, Paul Scholes and Jaap Stam all went in referee Stephen Lodge's book. They were joined by Newcastle's Alan Shearer, the England captain.

Second-placed Leeds also had three players booked in their Elland Road match which, at times, degenerated into a brawl.

At Newcastle, Manchester United's players were constantly berating referee Lodge

over his decision. At Elland Road the Leeds and Tottenham players spent much of the match arguing either with referee Dermot Gallagher or with each other.

A high tackle by Leeds' Bowyer on Stephen Clemence sparked anarchy as both sets of players grappled with each other and it was nothing short of miraculous that nobody was sent off.

Despite the scenes, the managers of Leeds and Manchester United were not ready to condemn their players.

"There was a lot of bad decisions against us and in these situations players are playing for big prizes," Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson said after seeing his side's lead at the top cut to three points.

"Alan Shearer heckled the referee during the whole game... he argued every decision," he added in mitigation. Shearer's booking came for dissent.

But Ferguson had no excuse for the way striker Cole overreacted to Keane's dismissal or Stam responded to a subsequent refereeing decision.

"Dissent is never acceptable... the players know that," he said. Ferguson dressed down his team after a number of players, led by Keane, surrounded ref-

eree Andy D'Urso when he awarded a penalty to Middlesbrough in a premier league game on January 30.

At Elland Road, for much of the match it was a return to the 1970s when Leeds were feared throughout England as a tough, uncompromising and often intimidating outfit.

Back then it was players like Billy Bremner, Norman Hunter and Johnny Giles who surrounded the referee to remonstrate over decisions.

On Saturday Lee Bowyer, Alan Smith, Harry Kewell and Ian Harte were never far from the thick of it in a bad-tempered affair.

"We didn't cause any incidents," Leeds boss O'Leary was quick to claim. "I'll let the great experts discuss the incidents..."

"I can't help it if people keep falling down they mustn't have the right studs on because the game is a physical game and I haven't got a dirty team, I've got a footballing side."

"It was a battle. But I'll leave the experts to decide who should have got sent off."

Manchester United visit traditional enemies Leeds next Sunday in what is sure to be a full-blooded affair.

Those of a weak disposition would do well to stay away.

African Nations' Cup

South Africa finish third



ACCRA, Feb 13: South Africa clinched third place in the African Nations' Cup on Saturday, beating Tunisia 4-3 in a thrilling penalty shootout after the North Africans had scored an injury time equaliser to secure a 2-2 draw in regulation time, reports AP.

Both sides scored three out of their first five penalties, pushing the contest into sudden death.

Ali Zitouni, who twice equalised for Tunisia in regulation time, saw his penalty saved by Andre Arendse, leaving Alex Bapela to clinch the match for Bafana Bafana.

Shaun Bartlett, the top scorer at the African Nations' Cup, struck his fifth goal of the event to give South Africa an 11th-minute lead.

Tunisia struck back in the 28th minute when Arendse made a hash of a Pierre Issa back pass, leaving Zitouni to knock the ball into an empty net.

Second-half substitute Siyabonga Nomvethe scored a fine solo goal to put South Africa back ahead on the hour.

Nomvethe collected the ball

Scandinavian fight!

COPENHAGEN, Feb 13: Eight were arrested in clashes between Swedish and Danish soccer followers in Copenhagen on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Trouble flared as two groups of Swedish spectators arrived for a friendly between FC Copenhagen and IFK Gothenburg. There was renewed fighting after the game, won 2-0 by the Danish side.

One group of Swedes supported IFK Gothenburg while the other from Rivals Helsingborg joined FC Copenhagen fans to battle their own countrymen.

on the edge of the penalty area and skipped past two defenders before thrashing the ball past Tunisian goalkeeper Chokri El Ouair.

The North Africans threw away a golden chance to equalise when Arendse saved Khaleel Badra's weak 80th-minute penalty.

South Africa, who beat Tunisia 2-0 in the final of the 1996 African Cup, are riding their luck, seeing a Tarek Thabet header hit a post amid intense pressure.

But Tunisia got a slice of luck in injury time when Arendse, chasing a harmless cross, slipped on the bumpy pitch, allowed Zitouni to head his second goal.

With both sides struggling to shake off the disappointment of a semifinal defeat, the match

was played in the normal low-key manner of third-placed matches, and less than 3,000 spectators turned out at the Accra Sports Stadium.

Co-host Nigeria meets Cameroon in Sunday's final.

LINEUPS

SOUTH AFRICA: Andre Arendse, Lucas Radebe, Mark Fish, Pierre Issa; Frank Shoenman, Alex Bapela, Pollen Ndhlanya (Siyabonga Nomvethe, 51st), Eric Tinkler, Isaac Shai; Thabo Mngomeni (John Moshoeu, 21st), Shaun Bartlett.

TUNISIA: Chokri El Ouair; Raouf Bouzayane, Khaleel Badra, Tarek Thabet, Walid Azalez (Imed Mehdhebi, 60th); Sirajeddine Chihhi, Hassene Gabes, Radhi Jaïdi, Meher Kan zari (Zoubir Baya, 73rd); Adel Sellimi (Zied Jaziri, 69th), Ali Zitouni.



African Nations' Cup leading scorer till date Shaun Bartlett (L) of South Africa being marked by Tunisian defender Mounir Boukadia during their third place decider at Accra on February 12.

— Internet photo

World Cup 2006

Brazil, FIFA boss' choice



ASUNCION, Paraguay, Feb 13: England on Saturday said it was the most ready, Germany said it was the best organised, South Africa and Morocco said they were the most worthy to host the 2006 World Cup, reports Reuters.

But it was Brazil that football's top man, FIFA President Sepp Blatter, said most deserved to stage the soccer extravaganza.

"I'm talking of a federation that has been the best in FIFA for the last four years which means it's well organised and of course deserves to stage the 2006 World Cup," Blatter told football leaders and World Cup bid promoters gathered in Asuncion, Paraguay for the South American Football Confederation's annual meeting.

"I'm talking about Brazil," he said.

The five nations competing to host the 2006 World Cup —

Brazil, England, Germany, Morocco and South Africa — will learn who wins on July 6 after FIFA's 24-man executive committee meets in Zurich.

Until then, the nations' promoters are travelling the globe, trying to score the biggest tournament in the game.

Blatter defended the idea of rotating the tournaments in all continents.

"We can't stop tournaments, for example, taking place in La Paz (Bolivia), where people play football from 10 years old... football is for everyone, even those living in extreme conditions," said Blatter of Switzerland.

English soccer legend Bobby Charlton said nations in South America deserved to organise the 2006 World Cup just as much as those in Africa or Oceania. But he said the nation best prepared for the task was England.

"The problem is whether any of them are ready," Charlton, England's World Cup bid pro-

motor told Reuters on the sidelines of the meeting. "We are fully ready," he added, slipping in the catch phrase England has dreamed up for its candidacy — "We Are Ready."

Charlton, a hero of England's 1966 World Cup win, said England had real soccer stadiums instead of athletics stadiums. He said the nation had a Premier League that was the envy of the world and a devotion to football that would be the inspiration of a 2006 tournament on English turf.

Brazil, the CSF's senior member, promoted itself as the "Fantastic Land of Football" and said South America, deserved to host a World Cup after a 28-year hiatus. The last one took place in Argentina in 1978.

promoters for Morocco and South Africa said it was time for Africa to host the World Cup — something it has never done.

Germany pointed to its infrastructure and its abilities to organise the complex event.